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The September issue of The Wire: full of all the (un)usual, rabid pages of features, interviews, CD reviews, books, multimedia, live events, free offers and more...

On sale Tuesday 29 August

letters

Frankly Ian...

I don't know where to put myself. I have almost a complete Zappa collection which I play frequently, simply because it is a mixture of things I enjoy. Yet I found myself agreeing with most everything in Ian Penman's dissertation (*The Wire* 137).

Occasionally find myself in the position of having to justify myself to friends who hold similar opinions to your man Penman (one memorably summed up his position thus "It's just *That's Life* with guitar solos") and those similarly at odds with the majority of Zappa fandom.

I think perhaps what Penman wrote was not so much a critique of a "body of work", or even of FZ himself, but of his fanbase. Like official fan clubs, official biographies, Dylanologists (or most anyone who uses the suffix "ologist" apertaining to another human being), Zappaologists are a right pain in the ass.

I have not since my mid-teens believed Frank to be a genius. A little research (which need consist of merely tuning to Radio 3 whenever the *Radio Times* mentions someone nameschecked on an FZ sleeve) reveals that Zappa was no more a distinctive compositional voice than Andrew Lloyd-Webber. His guitar playing was based on one idea something to do with modal scales, which I'm not analytically-nerdy enough to recall, but which he once freely copied to in a guitar mechanics magazine ("People seem to like it so I keep doing it"). He unceremoniously got rid of his best band and then spent the best part of his career (a) instructing session men to imitate them, (b) denying that they were his best band.

Still, I like it. What can say? To paraphrase Mark E. Smith's exceptionally perceptive *Invisible Jukebox* (*The Wire* 134) if you like it, you like it. It doesn't

mean you have to look like Zappa or behave like him.

So, if you want someone to review FZ stuff who is neither a Ben Watson-style fanboy nor a Penman-style cynic-of-cynics, apply within. I've been contemplating writing a piece called "Why Frank Zappa Was Not A Genius But I Still Like Lots Of His Stuff" for quite some time now.

Winged Ed Rogers Gwent

Congratulations and respect for printing Ian Penman's demolition of Frank Zappa. About time too. But Ian didn't really need two whole pages of text. All that was necessary was to point out in one short paragraph that Frank's music is patently, unambiguously dismal. When fans start excusing their heroes by using phrases like "postmodern irony" you know that all concerned have lost the plot. Good music speaks for itself — through originality and fun and (dare I say it?) even a tune and a good beat. Let's all relax and stop trying to impress each other and just speak the truth — no bullshit. Surely it's time we all admitted that Captain Beefheart is similarly appallingly unlistenable, Tom Waits is overrated, and only about a quarter of Tim Buckley's recorded legacy is halfway decent.

Simon Herberson Hampshire

I've been reading *The Wire* since issue 7 but Ian Penman's Frank Zappa article was undoubtedly the worst you have ever published. In *The Wire* 90/91 you laid out the pros and cons of Zappa's output perfectly adequately, so why you chose to waste valuable space with Penman's extended whinge is baffling to me.

More serious is Penman's belief that girls and drugs are among the best things in life. Since when have girls (or

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or fax: 0171 287 4767, or e-mail: the_wire@ukonline.co.uk
Every letter published wins a FREE CD

possibly (even women) been 'things'? And drugs? Musicians such as Charlie Parker, Tim Buckley and Kurt Cobain may have thought so from time to time, but there's nothing good about premature death or the loss of further creative endeavour.
Dave Watkinson London

Primal scream therapy

I read Edwin Pouncey's article on the 1960s Detroit rock underground (*The Wire* 136) with great interest. It was the primal scream of Motor City bands like MC5 and The Stooges that originally fired my enthusiasm for the free jazz of Coltrane and Shepp, Sun Ra and Pharoah Sanders.

I had read interviews with Iggy Pop and he often named-checked Coltrane. MC5's affinities with free jazz were perhaps a bit more obvious, their vocalist's surname could be assumed to be in tribute to the great McCoy Tyner, and as the article says, they included free jazz cover versions in their sets. In the ensuing years I discovered all these jazz players and to be quite honest I don't think I would be reading *The Wire* if it hadn't been for my discovery of MC5 around 1981 and Iggy And The Stooges the following year.

These bands led me to discover the world of black music from free jazz to funk, soul and blues. It's good to see that "Brother" Wayne Kramer is back on the scene again — I am looking forward to hearing his new album. Full marks also for the Sonic Youth And The Noise Of New York supplement (*The Wire* 134).
Tim Archer Aberdeen

Altered state

Ben Watson's recent article with Ianis Xenakis (*The Wire* 136) was wonderful

sane, communicative and able to put across an essential truth about the music — you hear it first before you theorise about it. (Check out some of your reviews of Ambient albums for the opposite point of view.)

Xenakis's music is often fiendishly difficult to play; its sound, however, is immediate, a massive thrust to the diaphragm. I remember hearing a performance of *Nuts* (for voice), a piece so dramatic and resonant that I felt as though it had entered and altered me. Everything else on that particular programme felt fiddly and contrived by comparison.

The primacy that Xenakis gives to sound — its timbres, explosions and silences — is a lesson numerous contemporary composers, who seem to exist more in the realm of ideas than execution, would do well to heed.

So thank you for the article and thank you for producing a magazine I read from cover to cover every month (except for the tedious banging on about Jangle). I love the passion and knowledge your writers bring to what they hear and am willing to forgive the clever-clever few who disappear up their own arses from time to time.

Dinyar Godrej Oxford

Critical voices

I thought you might be interested in the following comments, inspired by recent CD purchases made with your reviewers' recommendations.

"Turn it down!" — Gabriel (aged 12) on Home by Caspar Brodzmann Massakar.
"If it was up to me, I wouldn't even let you take it out of the shop!" — Our Price Manager on *Tit* by Scott Walker.

"This isn't jazz!" — My wife on *Live In Seattle* by John Coltrane.
"Haven't you got anything by Queen?"

— Pupil in my year nine English class on *Maximouye* by Tinky.

"I don't know how you can listen to this before breakfast!" — My Mum on *Suerte* by Albed Aznre and Pedro Aleido.

"I didn't know you had any good records!" — Manus (aged 17) on *Deepest Cuts Volume One* by Omre Tho.
John Coldwell Ramsgate

Northern exposure

Finally, we got our *Wire*. Unbroken, from Gothenburg. It is an adventure to read, partly because we don't have anything similar in Scandinavia. The more technology, the less real information, we're too slowly for pluralism.

But obviously, there are exceptions. Besides, *The Wire* seems to care about music 100 per cent, as they say. However, 100 per cent is probably not enough, since the magazine observes important connections between different kinds of modern art, without reducing the subject.

As freelance journalists, we can hardly get more than a few editors on our sides. Most of them prefer counting ears than looking at deeper impressions. According to many of them, every rock artist should sound almost the same, although of course they are supposed to have a certain, quite 'personal' image. Who's interested in AHHH, Art Zoyd, Justine, U Totem, a 20 year old jazz master like In Sanity or the young rock historian Hawks & Doves?

Anyway, it's hard to blame them, whoever they are. Besides, we don't know ourselves how to get the most interesting releases — unless some kind stranger happens to reach a stanning collector.

Gert-Ove Frilund and Marianne Berglund Loholm, Sweden

Bowel movements

Re Martin Archer's anti-Future Sound

Of London letter, *The Wire* 137.
I would like to confirm to Martin Archer that I have not, as yet, tried flushing a CD down the toilet, and that I found one 'uniquely repelling'. I would be more inclined to take it to the nearest second-hand dealer and part-exchange it for some cash towards buying another.

I would also like to say that after seeing Mr Archer play live in Sheffield a couple of times in the last year, although you may flush Future Sound Of London CDs down the toilet, they sh't on you from a great height. It's not what you know Martin, it's the way that you use it.
M. Sheffield

Ticky: not as good as Queen?



sounding off

Live dates, multimedia events, happenings...

Compiled by **Rob Young**

News items should reach us by
Friday 11 August for inclusion in the September issue



PHOTO: JAK ELLIS

BBC Proms 95 This year with a healthy sprinkling of contemporary works and premieres among the standard classical fare, the annual Promenade concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall are still the cheapest and most accessible way to hear a representative spread of composed music through the ages, from Purcell through Mahler to Arvo Part and Ligeti. The season runs from 21 July to 16 September, and curiously, the infamous Last Night contains a new piece by Sir Harrison Birtwistle, which should get the assembled pomp and circumstance lovers choking on their strawberries. The ones to watch for are: The Hilgard Ensemble performing Arvo Part's *St John Passion* (24 July), Bartok, Boulez and Messiaen (25), John Casken's *Violin Concerto* (26), Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Belstone Fire* (27), Birtwistle's *Endless Parade* (29), Webern and Thomas Adès (1 August, 7pm), Charles Ives and Judith Bingham (1, 10pm), Sally Beamish's *Violin Concerto* (2), Oliver Knussen and Hans Werner Henze (3), more Henze, this time his *Symphony No 8* (4, 7pm), Music From The Far East with Korea's SamulNori, China's Wu Man and Thailand's Fong Nam (4, 10pm), Chinese composer Tan Dun's *Orchestral Theatre* (8), Webern and Judith Weir (11), Magnus Ann's *Study On A Norwegian Hymn* (12), Michael Torke, Smetana and Shostakovich (14), Ligeti, Benedict Mason, Carlon Nancarrow, Varese and Julian Anderson (16), Poul Ruders's new *Concerto For Viola And Orchestra* (21), Lebanese organist/composer Nay Hakami's tribute to Messiaen (23), Bernard Randel's *Concerto Per Orchestra* (24), Thea Musgrave's *Smón Bolívar* (26), Kaja Saaranaho, Szymonowski and Scriabin (29), and Richard Meade's *Very High Kings*

(30). Cheapest tickets are in the Promenade Arena (standing, £3), and the Gallery (£2), and there's a wide range of prices for seats in other areas of the Hall (plus see offer below). Royal Albert Hall Box Office 0171 589 8212

THE WIRE/PROMS 95 NEW MUSIC OFFER

By special arrangement with BBC Proms 95, we can offer Wire readers discounts of **£3 OFF ALL TICKETS** (does not include Promenade or Gallery) for the following New Music programmes: Thursday 3 August, 7.30 pm Mahler, Henze and the world premiere of Oliver Knussen's *Orchestral Concerto* Friday 4 August, 10.00pm Music From The Far East - SamulNori, Wu Man & Ensemble, and Fong Nam Wednesday 16 August, 10.00pm Ligeti, Julian Anderson and world premiere of Benedict Mason's BBC commission *Gonnet Concerto*, performed by The London Sinfonietta Monday 21 August, 7.30pm Nielsen, Hindemith, Strauss and UK premiere of Poul Ruders's *Concerto For Viola And Orchestra*, played by The Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra To receive your £3 discount on these performances, simply take this issue of *The Wire* along to the Box Office when purchasing your tickets, or mention 'The Wire/BBC Proms Ticket Offer'. There'll be further discounts on selected September Proms announced in next month's issue



Arvo Part

Electronic Lounge

London's ICA will be closed between 31 July-13 August, but Loungers shouldn't fret, because there will be three EL sessions later in the month. The first is on 15 August, with DJ Paul Thomas from Kiss FM's *Chill Out Zone*, followed by Sons Of Silence aka Gan and Pete from O Yuki Conjugate (22) and Delta 9 (26). Admission to this, *Electronica's* inner sanctum, is £2.50/£2. Info on 0171 498 3032

Evolution

London showcase of glittering talent from Mark Pritchard and Tom Middleton's *Evolution* imprint, rescheduled from earlier in the year. Live sets from The Jedi Knights, Wash Mountain and Jak & Stepper, plus DJing from Global Communication, and various surprises and interruptions. Sabresonic, EC1 Club, 4 August, 10pm-6am, £8. 0171 729 8440

Disobey

An unpredictable night indeed this month, with punk graphic artist Jamie Reid delivering his history of pop, and 'artist' of a different stripe Cynthia Plastercaster doing her thing on stage and taking questions from the floor. Plus, as ever, GJ Beekeser holding everything apart. Upstairs at The Garage, North London, 31 August, 8.30pm, £6, info on 0181 960 9529

Stormy Waters

An epic, two day performance-cum-exhibition of terminal culture in a seaside setting in Glasgow, this mixed-media exploration of cultural transformations through electronic artforms features live music courtesy of Autechre, Plaid (ex-The Black Dog) and the local Sativa Drummers, and soundscapes by Underworld. With accompanying images by the Underworld graphic design house

Tomato, performance by Beltane Productions and narration by author Ronald Fraser Munro, Stormy Waters should be a weekend break with a blast 21-22 July, Glasgow Meadowside Granary, 9.30pm each night, ticket details on 0141 221 4366

Sonic Acts Amsterdam's second annual festival of new electronic music takes place between 16-18 August at the Paradiso. Hooking in musicians, students, multimedia artists, researchers and speakers from the Institute Of Sonology and The Hague Royal Conservatory, as well as musicians from the diverse fields of Techno, soundscaping, new dub and more, the artists at Sonic Acts will be performing in a theatrical setting and conducting sonic research projects over the Internet and with the new instruments being built by the STEIM centre. Record labels Staalplaat and R&S will be demonstrating their catalogues, Jerome Noetinger from French musique concrète label Metamorphe will run a music workshop, and there'll be musical performances from µ-Ziq, Oxal with Jim O'Rourke, and Holland's Yens & Yens, Dylan Hermelin, Sonja Mussaers and The Zon Club Orchestra. After the live sets, each night will dissolve into a club setting, with tapes from the day's proceedings cut with the DJ sets. More names are yet to be added: phone Ikaros Van Cuppen or Liesbeth Bagers on 00 31 70 381 4251 (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) or e-mail sonicact@sonon.nl for details, ticket information, etc.

TV & Radio

Message To Love (BBC2, 26 August) Part of a feast of remembrance (here and on Channel 4) of the live Of Whistle 25 years ago, this documentary provides frank, unglamorous footage of the doomed event seen for the first time. Includes live music from Jimi Hendrix, The Doors, Miles Davis, The Who, Free, etc.

Jimi Hendrix At The Isle Of Wight (Channel 4, 3 August) Complete, hour-long footage of Hendrix's 1967 set recorded 18 days before he died, reputed to have been one of his best.

Mystery Of The Senses: Hearing (Channel 4, 30 July) Examines role of hearing as means to survive, visiting Greenland's Inuits, whose hearing is vanishing, and explores ancient role of music for New Zealand's Maoris. Plus, Hollywood technicians demonstrate manipulative effect of sound and music.

Apoche Goes Indian (Channel 4, Saturdays from 19 August) Everyone's favourite bhangramuffin embarks on a five-part Indian odyssey, uncovering diverse mix of people, culture and music.

Blue Angels, Blue Devils (BBC Radio 3, 21 August, 4.30pm) Brian Morton uncovers Nat Gerson's clandestine jazz scene.

Hear And Now (BBC Radio 3, Fridays, times vary) New Music magazine. Robert Ziegler and Sarah Walker present live recordings, studio discussions, festival location reports and more.

Fixing It (BBC Radio 3, Mondays 10.45pm) Mark Russell and Robert Sandall host essential, Wire-on-air musical program. This month: no programme (17 August), all-CD programmes (14 and 28) and a specially recorded studio session from Prami (14).

Charlie Patton (BBC Radio 3, 13 August, 5.45pm) Russell Davies plays tribute to the pre-war bluesman.

On The Wire (BBC Radio Lancs, Sunday mornings 12.05-2am) Steve Barker plays everything from dub, World Music, Electronica, out rock, live jazz and beyond. Essential listening.

The Chill Out Zone (Kiss 100 FM, Thursdays 1-4am/Sundays 6-7am) Paul Thomas props those lids open with a current selection of Ambient, systems Jungle, Triphop, dub, etc.

Disengage (Kiss 102 FM, Saturday-Sunday 4-6am) Uninterrupted electronic mix courtesy of Autschke's Sean Booth and Rolo Brown.

Reading Festival Rock-orientated Bank Holiday weekend (25-27 August) still enjoys the occasional flicker. Björk, Neil Young, Tricky, Throwing Muses, Little Ave, Beck, Pavement, Stereolab, Royal Truck,

Kaliphz and many more. At Reading Rivermead Centre, tickets £60 advance for three days, info 0181 963 0940/0336 404905

Breakfast Club New dawn-to-dusk Ambient marathon in Central London location with different special guests every week. Silverfish, 146 Charing Cross Road, Sundays 6am-midnight, £2/£1, info on 0181 265 5329

Collide-A-Scope Based around a monthly sounddash between the resident Clean Up crew and outside labels/production teams, 29 July features Kevin Beadle with Vienna's Kruder & Dorfmeister versus Pressure Drop. Future collisions are planned with Ballistic Brothers, Terry Farley, Donato Records, Massive Attack and others. London Ormonds, W1, 10pm-3am, £8. Info 0171 739 8757

Dusted Hosted by James Lavelle and other cohorts from the Mo' Wax

label, Dusted offers one of the capital's finest mixes of avant Hip-hop, antcore, Jungle and futurist Ambient. The Blue Note, North London, Saturdays 10pm-4am, £8, 0171 729 8440

Metalheads Drum 'n' bass pioneer Goldie and his supercharged stable fire up their new, regular Sunday Session. North London Blue Note, from Sunday 16 August, 7pm-midnight, £5, 0171 729 8440

Sabresonic Andrew Weatherall on the eclectic decks with Alex Knight and special guests. London EC1 Club, 29-35 Farningford Road, Fridays, 10pm-6am, £8, 0171 242 1571

Uxi Festival Iceland's first large-scale dance event, by all accounts (4-6 August), held at (deep breath) Kirkjubæjarklaustur, three hours from the capital Reykjavik. Organised by The Drum Club's Lol Hammond, The Sabrettes' Nina Walsh and ex-Sugarcube Enar Kadd, the weekend will



sounding off

feature performances from Björk, The Orb, Club Techno, Underworld, Bandulu, Blue, Atan Teenage Riot, The Prodigy and Innersphere, with QJ's James Lavelle, Kris Needs and others, as well as various Icelandic groups and QJ's. The site also offers opportunities for glacier tours, snowboarding, horseback riding and boat trips. All-in tickets, including flight, will be around £340, anyone interested should phone Betty on 0171 401 9505.

Screenage Kicks NME-hosted festival at London's National Film Theatre (1-31 August) celebrating the interface of film with pop and related musics. The season promises both classic and rare footage as well as guest introductions and talks. Highlights include *Withnail & I* with talk by director Bruce Robinson (1 August, 8.45), *Midnight Run* presented by The Roo Radleys' Martin Carr (3, 8.20), *The Story Of Rat* — a compilation of rap videos and film clips from The Sugarhill Gang to Snopce Doggy Dogg (6, 6.15), *An Evening With Paddy Whitehead*, documenter and promo maker for such 60s luminaries as The Rolling Stones, Marianne Faithfull, The Small Faces, The Beach Boys, etc. (10, 6.30, with Whitehead in attendance), *Naked City*, a compilation of underground film making from New York's No Wave community (18, 8.30), *Kiss* introduced by Pulp's Jarvis Cocker (13, 4.00), *Beach Party* introduced by John Peel (15, 8.45), *Tonno Let's All Make Love In London* (17, 8.30), a Neil Young trilogy *Ragged Glory*, *The Complex Sessions* and *In Concert 1971* (20, 8.45), *Getting To Dayton* (23, 8.45), *The TAP Show*,



footage from the ultimate early 60s teen-pop hysteria programme (26, 8.40), and possibly the high point: Carl Dreyer's silent *Passion Of Joan Of Arc* soundtracked live by Nick Cave and Australian trio The Dirty Three (27, 8.45). The NFT also screen the UK premiere of *I Just Wasn't Made For These Times*, a new and probing documentary about Beach Boys founder Brian Wilson, made by record producer Don Was (11, 8.45 and 12, 6.10). Phone 0171 928 3232 for more details.

More Rockers Following last year's excellent first album *Dub Plate Selection Volume One*, ex-Smith & Mighty Jungles release a new single, 'Another Day', and strike out from their Bristol base on selected dates around the UK. Dates: Bristol Thekla (28 July), Leeds Ouchess Of York (4 August), London Blue Note (10), Hastings Crypt (17), and Bath Moles (18). The group have recently completed remixes for Towa Tei and The Raggas Twins.

Harry Partch Society

New British organisation set up to promulgate the work of the great American autodidact and microtonal innovator, campaigning for release of archive recordings and acting as contact point for anyone interested in Partch's work and microtonality. They also offer all currently available recordings of Partch for sale and promise a biannual Journal to subscribers. Membership \$15 per year, information on 0121 384 6885.

Black Mountains Gala

Shri don't spread it around, but the Big Chill is moving to a remote farm setting in Wales's Black Mountains district for a three day mini-festival (11-13 August). Provisional line up for the weekend so far includes Global Communication, Higher Intelligence Agency, Spring Heel Jack, Autotech, Mommens Morris, Tui, Paul Thomas, Rocket, Overstory Of Life, Bit Tonic, Virtual Owen, Hey!Coldcut, Nelson Olsson, Another Fine Day, Pete Lawrence, With Mountain, Cool Breeze, Goosebumps Sound System, AJ, IN4, DJ 4'33', classical QJ's, EASE and more. They'll also be arfing their other usual attractions such as 5P Visuals, Kitchens Of Resistance, a special circus performance and various other surprises. Attendance is strictly by advance invite only: places are now VERY limited, so phone 0171 281 8106 for more info. Customers are tactfully reminded not to expect five star luxury.

Competition Winners

Congratulations to the following three winners of tickets for July's N-Gram Recordings showcase: Ron Chinsley, Sussex, Eric Guttick, London, and Ziggy, Brighton.

Corrections

In last month's Bites section (*The Wire* 137), we forgot to credit Margaret Lanzoni for her photo of Zeena Parkins in *Independents Advice Part Three* (*The Wire* 136), distributors for two labels were printed wrongly: NMC is distributed by The Complete Record Company, while Swm is handled by SRO. All apologies. □

Live In Brief

Autecore/izoviet* france:

influential soundscapers in interesting triple-bill alongside GPR signings Germ and John Dalby, plus DJ Howard Jacques (of Putt!These Records) London Camden Irish Centre, Murray Street, 29 July, 8pm, \$7/\$5, 0181 202 7854.

Bustan Abraham

Arab-Jewish crossover seven-piece with Middle Eastern flavour, in the country for WOMAD London Queen Elizabeth Hall, 25 July, 7.45pm, 0171 928 8800.

Fun-Da-Mental

Alk Nawaz's Age-Hoppers explore their roots, with qawwali singing by Aziz Khan and live violin and tabla accompaniment. Plus Asian Dub Foundation, Hustlers HC and Muddy Funksters London Shepherd's Bush Empire, 28 July, 0181 740 7474.

Jazz Rumours

Louis Moholo Quartet (5 August), Bardo State Orchestra (13), George Grunew Quartet (20), Alan Tomlinson (27) London Vortex, Sundays, 4/5/3, 0171 254 6516.

Play! (Scheme)

New venue for improv larks directed by chance methods. London MacMillan Playpen, Deptford, 17 August, 8.30, \$25/\$2, 0181 692 0238.

Scream'n' Jay

Hawkins Swampy hysteria from 'I Put A Spell On You' cult favourite. London Clapham Grand, 24 August, £11/50, 0181 963 0940.

Tricky

One-off validation from Trip-hop's most wanted. London Shepherd's Bush Empire, 3 August, £16, 0181 740 7474.

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The annual **Sonar Festival** is destined to put Barcelona on the international map as a key meeting point for new developments in electronic music and multimedia. This year, Rob Young was there



Worldwide, more than 40 million people are engaged in commerce. However, 100 million people remain outside the global economy. Making global commerce more accessible to all governments should be a primary objective of the business community.

The two smartphones are being used in a public space. The meeting, which has been organised by the CCCB (Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies) in Las Ramblas and the Plaça de Catalunya in central Barcelona, is taking place at night in the Casa Del Port Espanol, a vast 2000 capacity nightclub on Montjuïc hill, situated in a permanent, armoured-invested hamppark of cars and metal struts. The events in CCCB provide the festival's theoretical and industrial infrastructure. The main auditorium, a marble crypt underneath the courtyard of a modernised 19th century palace building, holds a stage and seats ringed by trade stalls (small businesses and organisations such as the European Knitwear network – no heavy corporate involvement here) which becomes the local point for listeners, labels, representatives, distributors and musicians alike, as well as the site of various musical highlights. Ribba Rembaud and Scarmer – arriving in the midst of a national scandal caused by the confession of a failed security check that his CISED organisation had been scanning the King of Spain's mobile phone – cracks out a scorching hour of militant atmospherics, oblivious to the looks of damning amusement as the home crowd realise that the 'flocks of conversation, submerged in managerial static and ear-battering squeals of high pitched interference, are being hooked out of the sky in real time.

Other memories linger: Michael AP at Alcatraz Pool kicking off the festival with stunts, chanting sonnets and a welcome injection of stunion-beats; Danish outfit UFO with their earnest but uplifting ambience; The MacGuffin Ensemble's deceptively homely array of self-built MIDI instruments, digitised Shakespeare's koto, and drummed life-size huggo, exotic hoboish orchid. Scorn's Mick Harris kneeling amidst his crush of wires, furiously shaking his malfunctioning monitors; and Mexican Jorge Reyes, thumping his chest while inhabiting into a forest of delay-loaded masks, a time-travelling Aztec priest, ringed with candles and clouded with billowing incense.

More esoteric contributions are downlinked onto screens around the exhibition space from an adjoining cinema: improvisations conducted live over the Internet between Barcelona and Rotterdam by Atsu Tanaka, controlling electronic drones from body-fitted sensors.



Olivier Coupipe's popping bubblepop of natural sound recorded on photosensitive cells; and Macromessa's futuristic, astro-Babbit chamber music.

A separate multimedia area acts as a background research centre, with themed programmes of relevant music available on headphones, demos of new Spanish CD-ROM art and the grotesquely compelling sight of ex-Furax Delis Baus member Marcel Li Antuñez, at the mercy of spectators as they electronically mutate various sections of his anatomy (see left).

Meanwhile, outside in the small but well-appointed chill-out tent, the assembled techno-seekers are treated to their first blast of techno breakbeats courtesy of DJs Jon Tye and Kiss FM's Paul Thomas. Complaints are received from surrounding apartments, but within the CCCB kickdrums are a 'cultural event' and can't legally be shut down.

Overnight at the hillside club, steam is vented in copious amounts to a supercharged Orbital performance light years beyond their recorded output, and a glamorous slam by Ovolo and her group Fångarna, premier Spanish Techno-dive and star of the early Almodóvar films. Biosphere gets a bug in his sequencer and groins impatient hissing from the crowd but remains cool, cold even, and the last night is rounded off by Kenay Larkin's bang-on Detroit megamix, whirling around a pair of decks up in the rafters like a possessed acrobat.

"New art needs new industry, if not, it doesn't work," suggests Eric Les Pélaux, in reflective mood following six months of intense organisation. "There was a big difference for years between England and the States, and Europe and the rest of the world because of the language, because the most established language in rock and pop was English. But now we are in a democracy, because electronic music doesn't use words."

Sonar is sounding out the future, but thankfully remains unwilling to fix the readings. Like the statue of Columbus at the head of Las Ramblas, it points confidently at an unknown destination.



ngs

Dakar

Whatever Dakar's famously voracious taxi drivers spend their money on it's certainly not their vehicles. Scoured and scraped by the Harmattan wind, windcreens shattered, wires hanging all over the place, most can't achieve truly dangerous speeds. They do, however, all seem to be equipped with sound systems that make mbalax music sound absolutely fantastic. Those hard, cracking rhythms, punctuated by explosive drum machines and plangent choruses, the yearning, invocatory tones of a singer like Thione Seck, with the plaintive, hypnotic plucking of the sazim (the traditional lute), it all makes the perfect soundtrack for sweeping along the corniches — eagles wheeling over the rubbish tips — weaving among the careening minibuses, the wheelchairs and trolleys of crippled beggars, the milling market women. On yes, riding Dakar's taxis is fine. It's getting out that's the problem.

Since my first visit ten years ago, the number of pickpockets, hustlers and hawkers swarming along the edgy downtown pavements seemed to have increased tenfold. The once-elegant buildings of the showpiece of French West Africa are visibly crumbling. The currency has been devalued by 50 per cent, and a recent Economist survey rated Senegal the eighth poorest country in the world. This is hard to believe since Dakar

throbs with manic commercial energy: from the 'bana-bana' men who walk the streets trying to sell everything from sunglasses and cassettes to Bullworkers and shovels, to the massive futuristic banks being built on the edge of the 'official' city. And this explosive activity is nowhere more apparent than in Dakar's music.

The scene has been hogged for a decade by the likes of Youssou N'Dour, Baaba Maal and Ismail Lô — the generation that graduated through salsa, jazz funk and rock influences to create the characteristic mbalax blend — but now, facilitated by improved studios and pressing facilities, there's a sudden wealth of new talent: ancient grots and rumbustious women teaming up with whizz-kid Garage producers. Wolof rappers like Positive Black Soul and MB, and new teen idols for a generation for whom Youssou and Baaba are old men.

Aloune Kasse, foremost of this newer breed, was born in the very crucible of mbalax music, the Miami Nightclub. His father Ibra, the club's founder, formed the seminal Star Band which produced the first Latino-Senegalese experiments and gave Youssou N'Dour his first job — so Aloune went to sleep every night with the mbalax revolution reverberating through the floorboards. He sprang to fame two years ago with 'Aline Sioe Diatta', a haunting tribute to a female freedom fighter that saw him instantly dubbed the new Youssou.

I spoke with Aloune in a crowded and infernally hot bedroom behind the Miami. We sat on the mattress bed, surrounded by his brothers, all of whom play in his group. Like his more laddish rival Aloune M'baye Nder, Aloune not only desires but to an extent expects the international recognition Youssou and the others have struggled so hard to achieve. While there's a danger of

mbalax settling into a stylised formula, as evidenced by his latest release 'Thiaba B', Aloune doesn't see it as a problem. He and his young audience have their own agenda, their own dialogue to pursue, a world away from the expectations of Western World Music enthusiasts.

More immediately exportable is singer Coumba Gawlo Seck, famous as much for completing her formal education as for her sharp but attractive voice. An independent, articulate New African Woman, the personnel list of her new Paris-recorded cassette *Devenez* reads like a Who's Who of Senegalese music. Featuring a Latin-y duet with relative Thione Seck, slippery mbalax, and two traditional songs which are given a highly effective big production treatment, it seems only a matter of time before it achieves international impact.

But perhaps the most singular talent to emerge of late is the (blind) 14 year old Ablaye Mbaye, whose first cassette pitched his touchingly earnest vocals against extremely modern arrangements — and immediately sold out. I met him while he was working out the arrangements for his new album with his partner Tapha Faye, keyboard player with the Lemzo Diamond group. Disarmingly self-assured, Ablaye exudes music through every pore, lives it in every limb, beating out the percussion parts in the air and on his body, singing along with his old cassette, grabbing snippets of melody out of the air. He reckons that in five cassettes' time he'll be on a level with 'Youssou and Michael Jackson, that's it'.

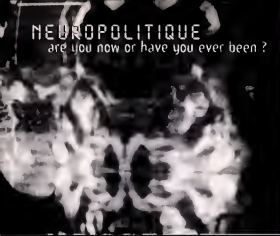
Since his success in the West with 'Seven Seconds', and his triumphant return to Senegal laden with trophies and gold discs, Youssou himself has become a figure of almost God-like reverence and remoteness. Once accorded a familial degree of acceptance by his fans, it's now years since he actually walked in a street. He's moved into a modernist mansion situated by the lighthouse at the westernmost point of the African continent, and installed his various operations in a nearby building so he can keep a closer eye on his many employees. But still, it's difficult to find anyone who'll say anything against him. It's now almost a matter of patriotic duty to like Youssou. And when he's in Dakar, he still plays at his club, the Thiassane, until 4am three or four nights a week. It's punishing, but that's his way of keeping in touch, or repaying the people who put him where he is today. Similarly, his latest cassette *Dikoor* is his boast and most 'African' for years. Seeing him perform the best number, the exultant praise song 'Naajan Naajan', standing in the middle of the dancefloor at the Thiassane at three in the morning, surrounded by a rapt and very young audience, seeming more like a charismatic youth leader than international superstar, you realise he is still definitely one of the good guys. **MARK HUDSON**

Dakar street drummers



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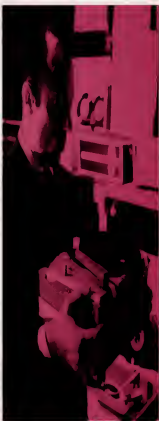
Spring Heel Jack

John Coxon and Ashley Wales of Spring Heel Jack are on a mission to mongrelise drum 'n' bass with gratings garnered from their lengthy progress through a variety of experimental musics. The latest broadcasts from their 15th floor East London tower block base include the album *There Are Strings*, a mixed bag that reflects drum 'n' bass's current rope-walk between making and breaking its own mythology, a four-part remix EP of their track "Lee Perry", and a stunning remix for Techno Animal (on a forthcoming EP for Rising High) that dubs the original's molten lava into igneous rubble and drifting ash. "When you do a remix," says Coxon, "it's always more relaxing because the material's already there. The sampler is the perfect magic tool you can't do anything else with."

The duo have zigzagged through diverse musical backgrounds: the classically trained Coxon — who moonlights as a guitarist in Spiritualized, bewildered by the music's dependence on "performance", Ash a keen listener who fondly recalls hearing Harrison Birtwistle's *Triumph Of Time* on the same day he was first exposed to Miles Davis's *On The Corner*, before cutting his teeth in a variety of jazz rock outfits, and a stint in 80s post-punk extremists The Shock-Headed Peppers. Now, their enthusiasm for breakbeat science is palpable: they pepper the interview with illustrations from their own tape

archive and afterwards descend on their neighbour-waking twin decks. Yet, as discourses of genres and questions of origin ignore the music's proven ability to screen identity out, Coxon confesses to confusion and mistrust. "We try to evade the situation where people stop hearing the music and start listening to the genius of music. You don't need to make sense of music. If you've got a scene that's described and proscribed by the press, and the scene itself, then it makes sense within those parameters. That's what I don't like."

It's the essence of Spring Heel Jack: be nimble, be quick. *There Are Strings* reflects a top-down, rather than bottom-up, approach to composition: deceptively dense textures overlaid on rhythms left up and running. The album's schizophrenia is as much to do with the times as their own diverse routes to the Jungle. The core moves from 'Appy to Dark through Art and back again. "Lee Perry" emerges dazed and confused through the mangle, embedded with suri-guitar, "bo-ba" chorus and scatter-bomb snare drums. Referring to an unreleased, 17 minute track, which samples bleeding chunks of Messiaen organ and Bob Dylan pinned together by a wobbling theremin, Coxon says: "That piece of music doesn't sound like 'Lee Perry', but to us it does: it was made by the same people under the same circumstances, and really for the same reasons. But it's not very tasteful." **ROB YOUNG** "Lee Perry Parts I-IV" is out now. *There Are Strings* is released on 7 August, both on *Rough Trade* (through *Pinnacle*)



Philip Jeck

One day in the early 80s Philip Jeck bought a Danasette record player in a junk shop and something clicked. "As soon as I got it home I thought, 'Yeah, this is for me. This is fantastic.' Somehow the roughness of it, it goes from 16rpm right through to 78, and it has its own speaker so you can play it without putting it through a sound system. I immediately found that this was my instrument although I occasionally use more modern ones, as well."

On *Loopholes*, his impressive solo debut CD, Jeck also uses tape loops and a cheap Casio keyboard to create a lo-tech Jungle without the breakfast — a collision of sources rendered unrecognisable through speed changes, short loop lengths and distortion. The progressive degeneration of material through successive re-recordings is celebrated in Jeck's



blissed out, textural aesthetic

For the *Loopholes* CD artwork, Touch label partner and graphic designer Jon Wozenart creates a neat visual analogy to the music using photographs of VHS playbacks of images generated by camcording TV pictures. The medium loops back on itself and enhances its own idiosyncratic qualities. "It's similar to the way I'm working with sound: just textures and landscapes. You're not quite sure what they are and it doesn't matter," says Jack.

"I'm not brilliant at keeping time with tunes or whatever," Jack continues, outlining his idiosyncratic and primitive approach to sound construction. "With looped records or looped tapes the rhythmic structure looks after itself. I listen to the sound and change the tone controls actually on the record players. And I only really use two effects — an old cheap reverb which goes wrong occasionally and a guitar delay pedal. I just fiddle around with the controls until it sounds right."

Jack trained in the visual arts at Dartington College and moved on to performance work in the 1970s. For a short while he was in demand as a DJ at warehouse parties imitating the innovative turntable techniques he'd heard coming from the States on records such as Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five's "Adventures On The Wheels Of Steel."

But it was during a five to six year collaboration with contemporary dancer Laurie Booth, which took him all over Europe, when he developed his own particular style on stage in front of an audience, tailoring his aesthetic more to the manner of performers like Paul Burwell and Max Eastley, whose performances at the old LMC building in Chalk Farm, North London had already impressed him.

Besides his ongoing work for dance companies (including a forthcoming BBC *Dance For Camera* programme), Jack also works with the song-based group Slant to which he says he brings "another world, another way of hearing." Slant's fourth album is due later this year. Meanwhile, Jack's biggest project, the 180 turntable audio-visual collaboration *Vinyl Requiem*, starts a European tour at this year's Hamburg Summer Festival.

Jack's listening habits are wide-ranging and eclectic, including Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys, Sinatra's Capitol recordings, John Cale and Nico, God, Material/Bill Laswell, fellow turntable manipulators Christian Marclay and DJ Krush, and the obligatory Bristol trio of Massive Attack, Tricky and Portishead. For performance purposes, however, Jack prefers the records he finds in car boot sales — records otherwise destined for obscurity.

Among the minimal information on the *Loopholes* CD booklet there's a Latin quote: "Versa est luctum cinihra mea." "That's from a piece of music I really like," explains Jack, "a funeral motet by a Spanish composer, Victoria. It means, 'My harp is tuned to mourning.' And I am in mourning about a lot of things in this world, in this country." **PHIL ENGLAND**
Loopholes is out now on Touch (through Kudos/Pinnacle)

Penguin Cafe Orchestra

When I arrive at his house, Simon Jeffes, proprietor of the Penguin Cafe, is filling in a future *Guardian* Questionnaire. He's arrived at the question "Which historical figure do you most identify with?" and is struggling with the answers. "The shoekeeper in Westerns who doesn't know what the hell is going on, or Satie. I don't know why."

Jeffes's identification with Satie is actually not that mysterious. It's easy to imagine the two of them hanging around in bohemian cafes having esoteric discussions and creating minimal, liquid, melodic music informed by non-European cultures which may or may not be some kind of elaborate joke. At worst, their music is charming, at best there's a kind of nostalgic inevitability underscored, at least in Jeffes's case, by a surprising rigour and real emotional depth, and a feeling that their music exists outside time.

As for Jeffes's reference to confused, mythical shoekeepers, he often says he is merely the Master of Ceremonies at the Penguin Cafe. "It's as though, spookily enough, the Cafe already has traditions and I have to serve it, otherwise nothing happens."

The notion of a Penguin Cafe came to Jeffes in 1972 after a much retold waking dream brought on by food poisoning. It was a chilling vision of an ordered, hellish space. "In one room there was a musician playing with his Moog with headphones on, no sound, with no life." After recovering, Jeffes thought the Cafe would serve as a kind of antidote to his vision. He agreed to my suggestion that the nostalgia of his music, particularly powerful in tracks like "Oscar Tango" and "Southern Jukebox Music," was partly a response to a lost sense of community.

The ambience of the Cafe was established before any music had been written. When the music did appear, in the mid-70s, it was released on Brian Eno's

Obscure label, alongside early works by Michael Nyman, Gavin Bryars, David Toop and Max Eastley.

What is it with penguins? "I saw this very moving documentary about penguins. Particular penguins had different characters just like us, but unconscious. Penguins are very lovable, the difficulties of their lives are painful, like the difficulties of children. The big question is, is there are anyone looking at us in the same way we look at penguins?"

The Orchestra has just released a double CD, *Concert Program*, which features a selection of live recordings drawn from its 21 year existence. Surprisingly, it's only the PCO's eighth recording. "It's the end of the octave," says Jeffes. "Now I have to move to the next octave." Jeffes attaches mystical properties to octaves in much the same way as the Russian writer/philosopher Ouspensky in his book *In Search Of The Mosaic*. He has also studied Zen and peppers his conversation with observations about magic and alchemy, most of which trail off mid-sentence. "Perhaps I should just let the music speak for itself," he says.

Jeffes's next octave will probably involve moving to Somerset where he will set up the Penguin Cafe, complete with bed and breakfast for visiting musicians. Musically, he says, "I intend to do a mixture of upfront stuff and esoteric harmonium music." He talks about "pooping around" with a very English sense of understatement, despite the fact that he is an obsessive and a perfectionist. Just don't expect him to chum stuff out. "I don't think you should feel you have to make an album a year or whatever. The important thing is to keep your eye on the ball, on the vanishing point." **PETER CULSHAW** *Concert Program is out now on Zed (through Grapevine). The PCO internet site is at http://www.hyperlink.com/penguin_cof*



Frances-Marie Uitti is a rare breed among classical musicians: her double-bowed textural improvisations place her far outside the usual orbits. Interview by Ben Watson

Frances-Marie Uitti plays cello. Classically trained, she is renowned for taking on the heavyweights of the avant garde: Xenakis, Ligeti, Zimmermann. She has played every important modern work for her instrument (over 300 of them) and each year premieres "anything from 25 to 50" new pieces. And unusually for a classical player, she improvises — brilliantly.

The daughter of Finnish parents, Uitti grew up in Chicago. Her father was an inventor and engineer (he designed of ngs) and encouraged his children to explore the physical world. Uitti remembers lying on the lawn, aged five, looking at Gemini through an enormous telescope. Her father was also a music enthusiast.

"When I was four I wanted a violin. My sister played the violin and my father played and he thought a third violin might be too much. It really didn't matter so long as it was with the bow. The bow on the string — I was very fascinated with that. The cello was a bit too big for me at first, the strings were hard to press down."

Uitti has made a thrust for new sounds central to her career. I wondered where this impulse came from.

"My father would turn on the radio and make my little sister and myself guess — early Beethoven or late

This focus on bowed sound — an essential building block for classical music — reveals aspects of music hitherto only appreciated unconsciously. Improvising, Uitti plays with two bows simultaneously, one on top of the strings, the other underneath, thus splitting the musical atom. The idea came to her in a dream.

"You can make a music that has never been made previously, it opens a world of sound. The under-bow acts in a three dimensional way, as a shadow, on the same string at the same time, a shadow tone. The cello is an instrument with long strings, it's the richest in harmonics, in the sound structure. So when you add another bow you're creating an orchestral situation, depth in sound, as if you enter it — very different from listening to two cellos at once."

Uitti went public with her improvisations in mid-70s Rome, where the avant garde was concentrating on timbre, sheer sound, rather than composition with ready-made quantities. The composer Giacinto Scelsi was central to the quest.

"I've worked on all of Scelsi's pieces. At that time I was developing the two bows and he was the first to hear it. He was extremely encouraging. We became fast friends until his death in 88. He was keen that I explore in depth the more meditative side of myself and to find a music that

improvisations recorded over the last ten years, and the complex and brilliant music evidently arrives from the same soundworld as Scelsi's.

Uitti's concern with acoustic sound production might appear reactionary and elitist, but it stems less from an ideological commitment to the supposed 'humanity' of non-electric instruments than from sober assessment of physical sonic.

"I think there's a problem with synthesis and the rest of it. The sound source is so innately boring, it is a signal, pure, whereas you get an instrument like a cello with harmonics — and imperfections, because in an infinite number of times you bow the string, the bow hair's never going to have the same imprint, that's what's interesting, all the variants of colour, all that complexity of the imprint. And we're just talking about the sound strata, not even the musical thought that goes in, the musical thought which could be a Richard Barrett or György Kurtág piece. At the moment I'm working on this concert with the two bows which becomes an orchestrated cello, or a cello squatted, whatever you want to say."

And does that preclude becoming a composer in her own right? "I'm very much interested in writing for other players, and that will happen — it's in the works." □
2 Bows is out now on *Burkhead* (through *Impetus*)

personal imprints

Beethoven, or harder yet, late Haydn. So in a sense that was ear training without knowing it, and also history. We didn't have religion in our house and music was almost a religious language. It fed a source in me, that wordless realm. It was and is the most poignant."

Uitti studied music at school, although she hated their "stupid little tunes" and "very American-style, fourth-rate music." Her fascination with the sound of the bow on string resulted in hours of solitary playing.

"I think that's where things grow best, in a situation which is not exposed to too much light and clamour — ie private. Also, playing doesn't have the pressure of logic that composing does. On the page you have to be in your intelligent mind, whereas with improvising your hands don't exist, your body is not there any more, you just do it, it's done somehow — it does you a very immediate kind of imprint in real time."

is really mine. I did follow that advice many, many hours going deeper and deeper into the complexity of the cello resonances."

In the early 80s, after having helped put Scelsi's papers in order, and with the departure of scene-makers like Frederic Rzewski, Uitti relocated to Amsterdam. She has recently released *Uitti 2 Bows* on Willem Breuker's Dutch Burkhead label. It's a collection of her

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From the industrial depths of Osaka (Japan) a stunning DJ-example is conquering our eares. Simple, chilly and steele beats with irritating vocal cuts and basistructural approach. Riou whips it together and a fresh, insatiable sound arises, already voted single of the month in DJ Magazine. KK133 12" & cds. Expect a new single and debut-album later on this year.

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One of the biggest pioneers in the industrial music scene Test Dept. have developed lately into an underground dance-group, creating an intense rhythmic mix between trance-like percussion, various instrumentation, programmed and sequenced technology. "Totality 1" is the first result of this transformation. KK135 12" & cds. New album on Kt records KK140 cd/lp scheduled for an october-release

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PHOTO: PAUL HARRISON/SONY

breakbeat descendants

4 Hero have been a driving force in drum 'n' bass since the early days of breakbeat culture. Story by Jake Barnes

Jungle, or drum 'n' bass as we are now being invited to call it in a classic revisionary move, is an optimistic force. Via the complex processes of interaction between sampling and the breakbeat, it offers a strong but malleable musical chassis that can broadshoulder and dramatise a disparate set of inputs, from funk to HipHop to the futuristic overtures of Ambient. But it's worth remembering that such a sophisticated state was only reached after a protracted and often hidden period of development.

Drum 'n' bass's present popularity seems to stem from the fact that it has finally reconciled its diverse constituent elements — which for arguments sake we'll define as Techno, reggae and HipHop — into smooth equilibrium. Such a balance required an awkward period of experiment and investigation in which the contributing factions were emphasised or curtailed to taste. If you listen to such mutant early 90s club culture fusions as Happy House, Hardcore or breakbeat, you'll hear stalwart UK HipHop being reconstituted amid the frenetic beats of the post-Rod rave scene, and dubwise bass lines warming up the cold heart of Techno. Play Shut Up And Dance's 1991 track "This Town Needs A Sheriff" and you'll hear subsonic bass empowering US rap, sin Third Party's 1992 "The Capsule" EP and you'll hear lovers' rock being electrified by nervous systems wired on Ecstasy.

4 Hero are as good an embodiment of this developmental process as you can hope to find. They've been involved in UK dance music (a poor phrase admittedly, but a necessary flag of convenience) since the first scratches of electronic music in the early 80s. They've accelerated from producing bedroom HipHop to sculpting prototype models for electronic music's hybrid future. Their recent output, including the groundbreaking 1994 album *Parallel Universe* — one of the first records to extend the drum 'n' bass

template beyond the length of a 12" single — as well as assorted tracks such as "Bring You Down" and "Music Is Music", their collaboration with Cold Mission, has a rarefied quality that stems in part from its sheer originality, its overwhelming distortion of convention. "I started off as a DJ," says Dego, who along with Mark Mac makes up the core of 4 Hero. "I used to have a sound system called Midnight Lovers. I've done pirate radio, run dances, everything. It was just being involved no matter which way you look at it. Then we got to the stage where we started making music and bringing it out ourselves."

As with many other Jungle practitioners, their early forays into HipHop came up against a wall of indifference. "All our friends used to do HipHop," he says, "and they'd be shopping their deals and they'd be shopping their deals forever. No one wanted it. It was a waste of fucking time as far as we saw it."

The pair moved into the bewildering subsectors of House and Techno. "We were all into that Happy House shit," he recalls. "We still are. We've got one more EP coming out under the name Manx. We've done the whole scene. Those rave days with 10,000 people in a tent up and down the country, Newcastle, everywhere, all-days and shit."

The track that first brought them attention was "Mr Kirk's Nightmare" in 1990, an eerie, prophetic cut that looped a sinister announcement of the death of a son to his father. "There used to be a lot of complaints about it," says Dego. "People still refer to it to this day

Even though we've had four dance number ones [including "Cookin' Up Your Brains" and "Journey From The Life"], it's always that one people talk about."

Between 1991 and 94, Dego and Mac recorded under a variety of names, including 4 Hero, Tek 9, Manx, Nu Era and Tom & Jerry, a name which summed up succinctly drum 'n' bass's animated loony leanings. With two additional partners, the duo established Reinforced Records. Alongside labels like V, Moving Shadow and Suburban Base, Reinforced has been instrumental in incubating drum 'n' bass. A sort of sonic laboratory crafted on the side of Dollis Hill tube station in North London, Reinforced has nurtured the careers of some of drum 'n' bass's brightest stars, including Nookie, Josh Wink and the ubiquitous Goldie.

"When we do stuff, we want it out straight away so we put the records out ourselves," says Dego, echoing the Jungle tenet of self-determination. "We don't want to wait while some big company thinks about it. Work, save up your money and just put your things out. That's

how Reinforced got going.

"If everybody had an independent mind then this thing wouldn't have started," he continues, referring to the strong infrastructure of the drum 'n' bass scene. "That's how anything interesting starts. People get their own buzz about themselves and the music and they go and put it out themselves. But the same people who rejected these sounds a couple of years ago are all involved now. They all want a piece now."

This September will see the release of a record under the elliptical name Jacob's Optical Slavery, for the Belgian label R&S. 4 Hero is the duo's 'experimental' project, the point at which they atomise the rhythmic matrix of drum 'n' bass, while the recordings they release under other names play more to the crowd. 4 Hero tracks cut their programmed rounds of beats and loops with saxophones and flexed lines of guitars. On *Parallel Universe*, their contribution to the recent Virgin compilation *Macro Dub Infection*, or the various 4 Hero remakes of tracks by Scarface and A Guy Called Gerald, Dego and Mac spool their breakbeats through echo boxes and distortion effects, pushing drum 'n' bass through to another dimension — almost literally.

Unsurprisingly, Dego has difficulty naming any current acts he listens to. "I hardly like any Jungle," he says. "Ten per cent is worth bothering with, the rest is nonsense. I listen to Techno and HipHop." □ 4 Hero's new album will be released at the beginning of next year. *Parallel Universe* is still available on Reinforced (through S&D).

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Two decades distant from Haight Ashbury and the UFO, the glorious, garish spectre of psychedelia has returned once again to haunt and fire the imaginations and desires of some of our most creative musicians. Although it is usually demised as a by-product of the Woodstock Generation (a soundtrack of amplified guitars, clumsily plucked sitars and whimsical lyrics), psychedelia in the 90s survives as an open-ended musical genre, one based firmly in the physicality of hard rock but flexible enough to accommodate the various worlds that surround it: free jazz, improvisation, ethnic genre musics and contemporary composition.

It wasn't just in America and Europe where psychedelia thrived. Recent excavations into the history of the music that was emerging from San Francisco and London. By contrast, current groups such as White Heaven, Ghost, Fushitsusha, High Rise, Toho Sara and, most recently, the astonishing Musica Transonic are using psychedelia's recorded artefacts like a set of precision instruments to prise open new durations of musical discovery, excitement and adventure.

A crucial figure in the rise of Japanese psychedelia is bass player/vocalist/composer Asahiko Nango. Previously

he has been the driving force behind Kosokuya, High Rise and Toho Sara. His current group is Musica Transonic, a supergroup of sorts, which also includes Toho Sara guitarist Makoto Kawabata and Rums drummer Tatsuya Yoshida. On the cover of their debut CD the trio refer to themselves as a "Contemporary Improvised Heavy Psychedelic Group", a rather dry and literal description for the intense, virtuosic, and massively amplified collective improvisations which sprawl across the record.

Nango's musical knowledge is extraordinary: in the late 80s he made a vow with guitarist Keij Haino to listen to every recording ever made, and currently claims to have heard up to 300,000 (!) records.

"I have listened to most of the musical recordings this world has produced," he explains by fax from his base in Tokyo's western suburbs, "but because the great majority of them lack universality and true originality there are very few artists I can admire. Of course I am interested in those people who are true originators and

interpret it. However, it's depressing to drag out some proper noun, attach the word 'post' and define something that way. Ideally, I would like the media to have a more universal range of vision. For example, as far as Cream are concerned we have in no way been inspired by their performances or power of expression. We have listened to all of their recordings, as well as the three members' subsequent solo recordings, and there's a vibration we can do without.

"We feel that their live improvisations are lacking in originality. Most of the artists who have appeared in the last 50 years are under the influence of America and have not gone beyond the 'post-something' tag. This is true worldwide and it's a shame."

Curiously, given the strong relations that seem to exist, from this distance at least, within the Japanese musical underground, Nango doesn't feel any form of kinship with musicians from his own country.

"Japan possesses an imported musical culture and its current music scene exists on the lowest level."

tokyo vibrations

Japan's **Musica Transonic** describe themselves as a 'Contemporary Improvised Heavy Psychedelic Group' — but that's only the half of it. Story by Edwin Pouncey

who lead the way."

Most of the artists which have fired Nango's interest are wretchedly esoteric, obscure medieval composers such as Guillaume de Machaut, Bernard de Ventadorn, Oswald von Wolkenstein and Carlo Gesualdo, along with such contemporary names as Iannis Xenakis, Giacomo Scelsi and Iancu Dumitrescu, who, he suggests, "possesses a good vibration." Jazz figures that get a namecheck include Albert Ayler, Lester Young, Thelonious Monk and Arthur Doyle, while similar extended lists of ethnic musics and selected blues, folk, country and vocal/chanson artists combine to form a clearer picture of the complex set of inputs that feed into a group like Musica Transonic.

When asked about what rock music has excited him during his research Nango replies, "60s psychedelic", but refuses to expand further on this particular field of interest. He does, however, admit to listening to the collected works of Cream, whose own attempts to extend a 60s R&B matrix via lengthy, collective, free jazz-inspired improvisations now sound like a distant pre-echo of the Musica Transonic sound. Is this an accurate parallel?

"If you understand the substance and concept then I don't mind how you hear the group or how you

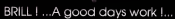
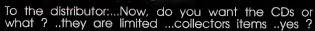
Japanese artists say nothing to me and I believe that we have no connection with the Japanese music scene. However, I do have some sympathy with some of the artists on the PSF label."

Ask Nango about how the Musica Transonic recording came about and where the group are heading next and he is much more positive.

"The CD is entirely improvised and mostly recorded in one take. There were no pre-written songs or rehearsals before the recording. We composed and arranged while we played by feeding off one another and then recorded the results. Certain tracks may appear to be more complete than others but this is merely due to the fact that something akin to a phrase or riff appeared by chance."

"I will continue to make music as long as I live. I would like to form about 100 different bands and unite, harmonise all types of music into one and sow the seeds of our vibration and thinking in record labels all over the world."

"I flatter myself that I am possibly the most ambitious and creative artist in the world!" □ Interview translated by Alan Cummings. Musica Transonic is out now on PSF (through Harmonia Mundi).



DJ Spooky is a Renaissance Man for the next millennium — a musician-cum-philosopher, a self-styled spatial engineer of the invisible city, spiriting between New York's musical underground and hi-rise art world. Profile by Simon Reynolds

twenty first century

schizoid man

If DJ Spooky, aka The Notorious B.I.G. had existed it would have been necessary to invent him: there was a gap just waiting to be filled by a figure who's not just hip to the piquant postmodern implications of cut 'n' mix culture but who goes out of his way to exacerbate them. That's Spooky: the DJ-as-philosopher, someone who can flit happily between the subcult underground of hip-hop jams, raves, Ambient parties, and the highbrow overground of *Artforum* magazine, ICA conferences, Semiotexte books.

With his lofty rhetoric and snazzy catchphrases — the mix-tape as an "electro-magnetic canvas", the DJ as "mood sculptor", Ambient music as "electronic ether-space", himself as "spatial engineer of the invisible city" — Spooky has become, in just a few years, both a celebrated and controversial figure on the New York scene. For some he's a cult, a lighttrope walker on the cutting edge, for others he's a magus of auto-hype, or worse, a nihilistic evangelist for the Death Of All Our Values.

"My two big things," the 24 year old whizzkid tells me as we sit in his favourite Thai cafe in downtown

Manhattan, "are 'cultural entropy' and 'post-rational art'." By 'cultural entropy' he means that, in the age of sampladelia, cultural signifiers are becoming deracinated and etherealised, eventually resulting in a state in which all difference has been erased. As for 'post-rational', that's art that isn't about narrative or meaning but a flux of sensations, "art that's immersive." The supreme example of both syndromes is digitalised dance music, particularly Spooky's faves, Ambient, TripHop and Jungle.

Veteran counter-culture rock crits and Marxist academics concur in finding Spooky's Baudillard-meets-B-boy discourse to be thoroughly decadent, an elaborate Pöhl rationalisation of political disengagement and surrender to the seductions of late capitalist hyperreality. Spooky slogans like "seize the modes of perceptions" just rub salt in the wounds of these mourners for the death of history and political agency. But the fundamental difference between these 60s nostalgics and a child of the digital night like Spooky is generational, temperamental, possibly even a question of a different structure of the psyche, based around a more tenuous but less oppressive sense of super-ego.

In a recent piece in *The Village Voice* entitled "Yet Do I Wonder" — part of a series of articles in which African-American writers ponder questions of identity and community — Spooky wrote that "every patriarchal 'family value' that I have ever thought of begins to crack and fall to dust when I think about the stuff of which my everyday life is made: DJing, living under almost squat-like conditions."

The death of his black radical lawyer father when he was three is both biographical fact and a crucial element of the Spooky myth. Having studied French Literature and Philosophy at Ivy League college Bowdoin, Spooky knows his post-Lacanian infant symbiosis and enforces the child's admission to the regime of language, selfhood and lack. If you don't go through this Oedipal crisis and abandon the infant's cosmic narcissism you don't become fully human.

The disappearance of his father from the primal scene is all part of the mythos of Spooky as anti-Oedipal prophet of the post-human aeon, wherein the self is just a "mindscreen" for all the switching centres of influence. Spooky as polymorphously perverse psychonaut surging through the dataclouds, merging with the digital cosmos, Spooky adrift in the womb-like cocoon of "bloodmusic" and liquid information. Or as he himself put it in the *Village Voice* piece: "I, the Ghostface, the Ripple in the Flux, am a kid who has gotten the picture but lost the frame, and life for me is one big video game."

Spooky's career began in the late 80s with a college radio show called Dr. Seuss's "Sleekie Jungle." "I was playing really mutated dance music — four turntables all going at the same time, turntable feedback, four CD players, two tape decks. It sounded completely fucked up."

Then came a club called Club Retaliation based in his hometown Washington. "We charged a penny to get in, so we'd get homeless people next to diplomats' kids. I'd





play stuff like Basement 5's 'In Dub' or loop the bass riff of Iron Butterfly's 'Inna Gadda Da Vida' into a breakfast and cut between that and EPMD's 'Get Off The Bandwagon'."

The inspiration for the Spooky Tha Subliminal Kid persona came from a character in William Burroughs's *Nova Express*. Like a semiotic guerrilla version of Scanner's Robin Rimbaud, the Kid tapes conversation and street sounds through radio transmitters and microphones installed in bars and cafes across the world then uses tape loops to pulverise meaning, rebroadcasting this "word dust" in "veves and eddies and tomedoes of sound down all your streets." All this is part of a struggle against the Nova Mob, who've seized control of the Reality Studio.

Initially, the Spooky persona was little more than "a media hoax, a prank," he'd go around town leaving cryptic stickers bearing the teaser "Who is DJ Spooky?" But in New York he gradually found aesthetic kinsmen on the emergent Ambient scene and soon had something of a career on his hands, playing at spaces like Chiaroscuro, Jupiter and his own club Abstrakt.

Unlike the UK's sensimilla-infused chill out culture, NYC Ambient is less about winking soundbaths and vegetative bliss, more about creating audio-sculptures and environmental soundscapes. Spooky and allies like DJ Olive call it "libent" as opposed to Ambient, citing the likes of John Cage, Stockhausen, the Italian Futurists' Art of Noises and Erik Satie's 'furniture music' as ancestors.

"I want to be what I'm doing to a longer music tradition which extends to a non-European tradition of Ambient too — like the West African thumb piano that's played at ceremonies, or Javanese gamelan. Recently I've been playing all backwards jazz sets, or blues Ambient sets using John Lee Hooker's instrumentals. Blues to me is a form of ambience too — it's people feeling this psychological compression, being pushed out of the world. You have to create a psychic space where you can reemerge yourself against all these forces which are pulling you apart."

The phrase 'compression' is something of a Spooky motif; later, he rails against the "spiritual compression" of rap, which he attributes to hardcore/gangsta's fortress mentality and psychic armature. "I have this phrase, 'You're so hard, you're broke!'," he laughs. Spooky's roots lie in a neglected, mostly non-verbal tradition of HipHop that includes Steinski and Mantronix, a collage aesthetic that has re-flowered in the UK in the form of the Mo' Wax label and antcore drum 'n' bass.

"To me the two casualties of HipHop's industrialisation are graffiti and breakdancing. Those are the two really profound art forms of the late 20th century. Graffiti broke the laws of consensual urban reality — it said, 'We're gonna change this city. As for breakdancing... in voodoo [Haitian voodoo] they have this thing called the casse which means 'break'. They have a series of dissonant percussive breaks and that's the point at which the spirits, the loa, take possession of the dancer. So breakdancing is

an extension of the West African tradition of ritual dancing." (This idea also goes some way towards explaining the 'voodoo magic' of Jungle, which is rhythmically composed entirely out of breaks or cassettes.)

Appropriately, Spooky nearly ended up playing the role of the late graffiti-influenced, high art renegade Jean-Michel Basquiat in Julien Schnabel's forthcoming bopic. He's also contributed both liner notes and two very peculiar tracks, "Journey (Paraspace Mix)" and "Nasty Data Burst (Why Ask Why?)" to an album of experimental HipHop called *Voits* that Bill Laswell has organised. "Journey", with its jet plane whooshes, trains rattling over the tracks, soundbites from spoken word records and alarming eruptions of untraceable soundscapes, recalls the 'musical' collages of Strafe Fur Rebellion, zweifrance and their ilk. "Nasty Data" is an even more aleatory haze of deteriorated sound sources, featuring, claims Spooky, some 80 overlapping beats "deliberately randomised and clashing." It's hard to imagine any modern B-boy recognising either track as HipHop.

This is just the first in a deluge of Spooky-related 'product' via pretty much all media known to man. For starters there's going to be an EP on NYC rave label Liquid Sky and an album for Rhythm King. What this music may turn out like can perhaps best be gleaned by considering Spooky's list of musical influences, none of which — with the exception of Jimi Hendrix's *Electric Ladyland* — are actually musical. Reference points cited include the nouveau roman novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, such films as *Last Year At Marienbad*, *Blade Runner*, Burroughs's *Towers Open Fire* and *Sun Ra's Space Is The Place*, science fiction novelists such as Neil Snow, Crash Stevenson, Philip K Dick and Samuel Delany. Tophop with no return ticket?

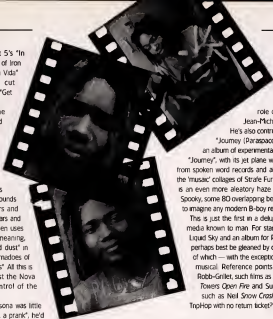
Spooky wants each track on the Rhythm King album to "literally flesh out compositionally", which is a chapter in his own forthcoming sci-fi novel *The Dilemma Of The Ghost/And How A Message From Our Sponsors*. Also on the discursive front, there's going to be a theoretical meditation on his culture called *Flow My Blood The DJ Said*, in which Spooky will expand upon his notion of *sampladelia* as the resequencing of music's genetic code. A preview portion of the book appears as the liner notes to *Voits*, but given the manifold distractions of Manhattan, Spooky says he'll probably have to take a sabbatical at the Sun Ra Institute in Pittsburgh in order to finish the damn thing.

In addition to DJ work and writing music criticism for *Village Voice* and *Artforum* under his real name Paul D Miller, Spooky finds time to paint pictures (which he calls "objecties", signifying art that aspires to fluid) and build noise-generating sculpture-mechanisms like *The Time Machine*. The latter is a bicycle whose wheels have been replaced by turntables, when you pedal, a tone arm with three needles plays the record.

"I'm stretched real thin at the moment," complains Spooky. But the next minute he's enthusing that he's 'really into schizophrenia, the idea of inhabiting all these different personae.' Partly he's talking about his yen for multitudinous monikers, a menagerie that includes DJ Spooky Tha Tactical Apparition, Tha Ontological Assassin, Tha Coded Waveform, Tha Alphabetic Bandit, Tha Dream Cyclone, Tha Renegade Chromomancer, Tha Semiological Terrorist. But he's also referring to the way he migrates through different milieus, blending chameleon-style with the scenery.

"I pass through so many different scenes, each with their different uniforms and dialects. I think people need to be comfortable with difference. HipHop isn't. It says, 'You gotta be down with us.'" Stretching his 'self' to the point of snapping, Spooky's a renegade against identity politics, a cultural nomad at home nowhere and everywhere. □

Valis 1 Destruction Of Syntax is due for release on Subharmonic. Spooky Ds regularly at Abstrakt Wave, Sundays at the corner of 6th St and Avenue B, New York. He will shortly appear in *Mothership Connection*, a forthcoming Channel 4 documentary on the black science fiction tradition.



“Blues to me is a form of ambience — it's people feeling this psychological compression, being pushed out of the world.”



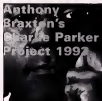
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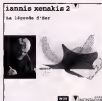
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The ritual of Boujeloud

The ancient trance music of Morocco's **Master Musicians Of Joujouka** has scorched the imaginations of Western artists of all persuasions, from William Burroughs and Brian Jones to Ornette Coleman and Bill Laswell. Chris Campion travelled to the Rif Mountains to uncover the history of this legendary ensemble

spirit masters

“One day they were invited by the first King of Morocco to come and play for him. They played in all his palaces and often a musician would be gone for so many years that he would come back to Joujouka and find his son grown and himself a Master Musician.”
— from *Tales Of Joujouka* by Mohammed Hamri

There is an intimate relationship between life in Joujouka, its folklore and the ancient music of this village situated in Morocco's Rif Mountains, which is handed down through generations of musicians. The music is derived from and closely related to events, characters and locations in the village. This fact is often conveniently forgotten, as Western perception of the music is more closely associated with the Westerners who have made the pilgrimage to Joujouka. Some have come to appropriate the music and have benefited from the cool that Joujouka confers in the West, while the people of Joujouka have benefited little. In addition, the way the music has been presented in the West, via, for instance, William Burroughs's fevered accounts of the Joujouka ritual of Boujeloud, have propagated the idea of Joujouka music as a repository of dark, psychic forces rather than a response to the local imperatives of the village.

It was Paul Bowles and Bronn Gysin, two seminal Beat figures, who did most to build the reputation of Joujouka in the West, with little personal gain. But it was The Rolling



Burroughs, Gysin and Hamri

Stoner's trip to Morocco in the late 60s that some would say sealed the fate of Brian Jones and built the reputation of The Master Musicians Of Joujouka.

Mohammed Hamri is a name closely associated with the dissemination of Joujouka music in the West. It was Hamri who first brought Bowles, Gysin and Jones to Joujouka. (He also introduced Timothy Leary and Ornette Coleman to the village — the latter's 1978 album *Dancing In Your Head* included a track recorded with The Master Musicians.) Two decades on, it was through Hamri that Frank Rynne and Joe Ambrose, the producers of *Joujouka Black Eyes*, a new album of Joujouka music, became acquainted with the musicians. Joe Ambrose, who has been filming the musicians in Joujouka, explains how they originally linked up with Hamri and the musicians.

"We were organising an art show in Dublin of the paintings of William Burroughs and Binon Gysin [documented on the video *Destroy All Rational Thought*, released by Visionary UK] and were aware of the Joujouka connection with the two of them. People told us that Hamri was fit and cruising 60 with the energy of a 20 year old

and that he would be an appropriate guest to bring to Dublin, since he'd had so much to do with the Tanger Band scene. People were telling us that he was a very great painter and a great cook.

"When we tracked him down in Tanger he was very helpful. He agreed to travel to Dublin and said he would bring The Master Musicians Of Joujouka with him. This blew our minds a little because they were so legendary and since sightings of them have been few and far between. He brought four musicians to Dublin, stressing the fact that he had a huge array of them back in Joujouka. This proved to be true when we finally got to the village. He has a core group of about 30 musicians, plus another 30-odd that he draws on from time to time."

Hamri is the administrator of the Joujouka Folkloric Association, a government-registered organisation that officially recognises the musicians. A membership roster is maintained in a weathered blue schoolbook that Hamri keeps. It reads from back to front, like an Arabic book, each page listing the name, age, occupation and year of joining of each musician next to a faded passport photo. The membership card that each musician holds resembles a passport to an independent state.

In spite of this there is currently some confusion as to the identity of the real Master Musicians Of Joujouka. The group which toured the UK recently isn't the same one that appears on *Joujouka Black Eyes*.

The former is led by Bachir Attar, and also claims to have the endorsement of the King of Morocco, Bachir, who has appeared on two Bill Laswell-produced, Joujouka-related albums, *Apocalypse Across The Sky (Axiom)* and *The Next Dream (CHMP)*, also played on the album that resulted from Brian Jones's numerous trips to Morocco. Brian Jones Presents *The Pipes Of Pan At Joujouka*. That was in 1968, when Bachir's father was the leader of the village, a title now claimed by Bachir, who takes issue with

**"We believe that
Joujouka is a healing
music, and never before
has the world more
needed the restorative
effect of this music."**



Hamri's "administration" of The Master Musicians. According to Rory Johnston at Point New York, the label that has just reissued the Brian Jones album, the split between Bachir and Hamri is "a classic artist/manager dispute" which goes to show that 4000 year old North African trance music ensembles are as prone to logistical in-fighting as Western rock groups.

Whatever the verities and outcome of this particular local difficulty (which is documented in the book *Joujouka Rolling Stone* written by Stephen Davies, the author of the notorious Led Zeppelin biography, *Hammer Of The Gods*), Hamri's house remains a focal point for many musicians in Joujouka.

You can hear hours of music every day while staying at the house. The porch acts as a clubhouse for the musicians, but none of them ever ventures inside. They sit on two thin mattresses against the walls of the house. A canopy across half the porch keeps the area cool and dry. The musicians come here to pass the day when there is no farmwork to be done. They sit on the porch talking, telling stories, smoking kif and playing for their own pleasure.

The musicians who live nearby — and who therefore spend plenty of time on Hamri's porch — include Larachi, Arsan, Syra, Titi, Mukhtar, Komsi, Rada, Muehdj, and his son Munir. They make up the core of the group that Frank Rynne recorded for *Joujouka Black Eyes*, most of which was recorded on Hamri's porch. What makes the group interesting is that they span the entire range of age and experience, from Munir, who is just 17 and eager to learn from the other musicians, up to his father Muehdj Muehdj, who at 78 years old can be considered a true Master Musician. Muehdj is one of only five people who played on the Brian Jones album still left alive. Titi Attar is another, although he was only nine years old when he and his cousin Bachir sang and played drums on the album. Munir also dresses in goat skins to perform Boujeloud, a role which was also played by a teenage Hamri.

The music begins in earnest as dusk approaches. Paraffin lamps are lit and placed on the porch. After dinner, which Hamri serves on a large tin platter, the musicians smoke kif while mint tea is prepared. Soon, bamboo flutes are passed out and Hamri goes inside the house to fetch the hand drums hanging on the walls. He then takes his place in a wicker chair, wrapping his white jellaba around him, looking like a distinguished Berber Prince.

One musician may start by playing a few repeated phrases on a drum or flute, which builds as other musicians join in. Each musician brings his own signature and personality to the music. Watching the older men, one can't help but be amazed by their vitality and the energy and effortlessness with which they play. These are musicians who have played day in, day out for 50 or more years of their life.

The musicians play three types of music, each with specific origins and purposes. Jbil folk music, Sidi Achmed Sheech music and Boujeloud music. Jbil music comprises songs of the mountains, songs about love, life and the land. These are performed throughout the Rif Mountains on a variety of instruments. In Joujouka they are played on rhaïtas (long, flared, hard wood pipes, like clarinets, from which hang a decorous string of bone beads), two-sided hand drums, bamboo flutes and, occasionally, fiddles. The drummers play a steady beat with one hand and very complex beats with the other. The flute and rhaïta musicians play equally complex melodies around small bundles of notes. They repeat and shift melodies in sync with each other, changing when you least expect it. The rhythms are very trance-like. It is the repetition that draws you in, and the sudden change of melodies that hurtle you into another space.

The music of Sidi Achmed Sheech has its roots in Islam: it derives from music originally written by the Saint (Sidi) and Sufi scholar Achmed, who brought Islam to Joujouka. The Santuario, Sanctuary and Shrine of Sidi Achmed Sheech is (along with the mosque, the cemetery and the cave Magara) a sacred place in the village. It is here that villagers go to give offerings to the Sidi and where the musicians perform this extraordinary music, said to be able to heal sick minds and confer protection against enemies.

Hamri explains the importance of this ancient music: "I have worked with Joujouka

for over 50 years now and the special power of their music was always important to me, important to bring to the world. We believe that the music of Joujouka is a healing music, and I believe that never before has the world more needed the restorative effect of this music."

The music and rites of Boujeloud are what most people associate with Joujouka. William Burroughs described it as "panic music" in reference to its intended effect. Gysin believed the rites were descended from the Roman road race of Lupercalia,

and that Boujeloud was an incarnation of Pan, the goat-god of fertility (and, literally, a rural god that caused terror).

In Joujouka legend, Boujeloud lives inside Magara, a natural cave in a rock that rises unexpectedly out of the hill next to the one on which Joujouka is located. The rites of Boujeloud are enacted in the village once a year on the Aid Kebr, an Islamic holiday which takes place a month and a half after Ramadan on the lunar cycle. The rite itself is unique.

to the village. Boujeloud is traditionally played by a young boy dressed in goat skins, his head covered by a straw hat tied down around his blackened face. In the legend, the farmers offer Boujeloud the premeest girl in the village in return for his blessing on their crops and women. When Boujeloud comes running down the mountain to claim his bride, who is actually an old woman called Asha Homoka, the musicians surround him and play music to calm him down and keep him docile.

The musicians play what amounts to a symphony, a suite of seven separate songs. Each has a different meaning, different lyrics and a different tempo. The whole is a progression of these songs played in a specific sequence, each of which denotes a certain act, like an opera, in the rite of Boujeloud. This can go on for four or five hours

“After Brian Jones's last visit to Morocco, Hamri wrote “Brian Jones Joujouka Very Stoned” to ensure he wouldn't be forgotten.”



Brian Jones in Tangier, late 60s

PHOTO: PHILIP COOPER



or more, the musicians playing throughout, lengthening the individual songs and displaying an extraordinary stamina

The music and the rite of Boujeloud are proof of Jajouka's roots in pre-Islamic times. It may well, as Gysin believed, be related to a celebration of Pan, but it is more likely the last vestiges of an ancient Earth religion, with Boujeloud as the earth spirit in the form of a goat (Jajouka is a farming community that was until fairly recently isolated from the rest of the world).

It is said that a royal decree by the Sultan of Morocco freed the men of Jajouka from the obligation to work so that they could play music. And while this may be strictly legend, it is true that the women, who live very different lives from the men, do most of the work.

The ways and methods of Jajouka still conform to a medieval farming culture. The land is ploughed by donkeys pulling a single blade. The staple crops are corn, wheat and barley, garden vegetables, olives and olive oil (which is sold outside the village). If the crop fails then there is nothing to fall back on and times will be hard. The musicians, who have profited little from past recordings, supplement their income by playing at weddings and festivals in villages in the surrounding area.

In the past, Hamri has sought to provide the musicians with a livelihood playing music. At the first 1001 Nights restaurant in Tangier, which he ran together with Brion Gysin, a rich, ex-pat clientele were able to dine and listen to The Master Musicians playing there every night. The crowd who frequented the 1001 Nights was very influential and upmarket, drawn from the diplomatic and intelligence community in the area of Tangier that provided the model for William Burroughs's *Interzone*.

Hamri lived with Paul Bowles in the late 40s. At the time, Bowles was making field recordings of Moroccan music for the US Library Of Congress. Hamri was encouraged to paint under the tutelage of Brion Gysin, himself a quite brilliant but largely unrecognised painter. Hamri's paintings, which cover the walls of his Tangier apartment, depict Moroccan street scenes and landscapes as well as portraits of traditionally

dressed men and women.

Hamri first met Brian Jones at the Minza Hotel in Tangier. Later, Jones visited the 1001 Nights in Asilah and would come back to Hamri's apartment after the restaurant closed to talk through the night. Jones visited Jajouka six times in total, the recordings he made being released posthumously on the *Pipes Of Pan* album. Hamri considers the Brian Jones 'epoch' to be a major event in the village's history. After Jones's last visit to the village, he wrote a song, 'Brian Jones Jajouka Very Stoned', to ensure the Rolling Stone would not be forgotten.

Frank Rynne is himself a mine of ideas and information on Jajouka. In describing his own attraction to the music of Jajouka he reveals an aspect that could have attracted Jones, too.

"For me, Jajouka is special because it is a pure repository of a folk tradition that is going back for God knows how long up there in the Rif Mountains. The people in Jajouka say that it is the oldest music in the world. Some of the music they play is undoubtedly very old indeed. Some of it has been influenced by things that happened over the last 500 years, to do with the history of Morocco, Spanish influences, for instance. But the core of their sound derives from the very beginning of music. In the same way that what became R&B derived from slave songs and field songs, which themselves derived from long-forgotten African music that we don't know a lot about.

"The sound of Jajouka reminds me of Robert Johnson and Son House. When they sing in Jajouka it has the same effect on me as those old blues guys: the simplicity of it, the way they play around with the same couple

of notes. I don't think that anyone who has ever been to Africa would say that it is an unemotional place. Morocco is full of emotion, and the emotion in the music of Jajouka is something special." □

Jajouka Black Eyes is out now on *Sub Rosa* (through Cargo, These). Brian Jones Presents The Pipes Of Pan At Jajouka is available on *Point Music* (through PolyGram).



Abdulah Larachi and Ansari Attar on Hamri's porch

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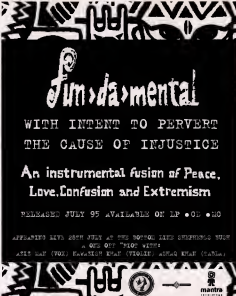
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Application forms and guidelines are available from Celia Hill, Music Department, Arts Council of Great Britain, 14 Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 3NQ. The closing date for the scheme will be 15th September 1995. Please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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invisible jukebox

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of...

Peter Hammill

Tested by Mike Barnes

"He's done for the voice what Hendrix did for the guitar," was Robert Fripp's opinion after Peter Hammill had guested on Fripp's 1979 album *Exposure*. As a teenager at the tail end of the 60s, Hammill formed Van Der Graaf Generator, who quickly established a reputation for extremity at odds with the safer climes of most of their contemporaries in the area of progressive rock. Live performances were spontaneous and notoriously erratic, and a contemporary source described *Pawn Hearts* as the most nihilistic album since The Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat*. With various line-ups the group recorded nine albums. Hammill's solo canon is currently standing at an intimidating 25 releases. Hammill always trod a challenging aesthetic path. Perhaps that's why, at the height of punk, he was one of the few of his contemporaries to escape vilification. Over the years his approach has expanded to encompass tape loop experiments, music for TV and ballet and an opera, *The Fall Of The House Of Usher* (which featured appearances by Lene Lovich and Esiare's Andy Bell). But what remains constant throughout is his singular take on the song. Hammill lives in Bath, recording in his own Terra Incognita studio. Three of his solo albums have just been reissued by his own Fie! label.

TODD RUNDGREN

"International Feel" from *A Wizard, A True Star* (Bearsville)

Randy California? No, Rundgren [Sings along] He is one of the only other people [in the early 70s] doing solo recording. He came from the angle of being a mega-producer and totally in control of things. This is the peak period *A Wizard, A True Star* and *Todd*, the double one that's just after this. He had — I'm not sure that it remained much beyond this period — a self-deprecating sense of humour. I think on the cover of *Todd* there's a shot of him recording in a rented villa somewhere with an extremely expensive Neumann mic taped to a broom which was attached to a chair and that I thought was great. The true spirit of home recording! These two albums I thought were really fantastic. The Utopia stuff went completely barney for me.

With all that it's easy to overlook what a great white soul singer he is.

"International Feel" was complete rock stuff, but there is this Philly soul angle as well and you can tell that all his enthusiasm is still there from when he was a teenager. Yeah, real good singer, great guitarist, too. He certainly made a big contribution. Prince wouldn't have been Prince if it hadn't been for Rundgren. "Purple Rain" could easily have been a Rundgren track on either of these two albums.

Was his self-contained solo approach an influence?

By the time I'd discovered him I was already underway with home recording. I started because Teac four-tracks came out — and it was simultaneously a defensive measure and a creative effort. The defensive measure was that even at this early stage, 72 or 73, I had an inkling that the music business might not wish to have me on its roster forever. And therefore I'd better get a means of production if I wanted to carry on doing music.



The creative part was that I thought a different music would turn out. It was much more wild and uncontrollable, now it's almost the norm. It's very hard now to be absolutely experimental in that self-recording role because there's so many possibilities, so many sound sources. When it was just a piano, guitar, harmonium and voice, it was in a way more challenging. And of course you can't unmake it — the culture now is a different thing.

WILLIAM BYRD

"Lord Have Mercy Upon Me" from *Choral Works* (Naxos)

Purcell? Sounds a bit too jolly for Dowland.

It's William Byrd.

My Byrd angle is usually the ecclesiastical one. I go for the masses because there's this wonderful secret musical aspect. He was a Catholic in the court of Elizabeth I and it was the time of priest holes and so on. Obviously he

composed ecclesiastical music for the Church of England but being a Catholic he also wanted to compose masses, so he had to compose masses that could be sung by three or four people because the maximum congregation would be about five. So he had this music which is devotional but is also secret. And because he's a Catholic he invests all his feeling into them and they're absolutely wonderful.

[I think] Byrd's stuff is great — without being an authority because they all drift past me, the Purcells, the Tallises, the Byrds, the Dowlands. But it's almost notation tank music. The logic, without being that active Bachian or Mozartian logic, is very calm, rigid, very English. I don't know what it is about the Englishness of this music but it goes right through to Britten and Walton and so on. I do find that very attractive — without wanting to be nationalistic about it. There is a line that goes through there to Elgar and so on.

Dowland is my favourite at the moment. There's a wonderful one, I think it's the *Lochrymoe*. It's so very, very sad and mournful and at the same time it's so restful. So yes, I like the calm and the order.

You say it's restful. Thinking of the packaging and success of the recent CDs of Spanish monks chanting, do you think this sort of ancient, spiritual music just becomes lifestyle muzak today?

It's restful but it's very active at the same time. That's why I was going on about the moroseness of things. There's an uncertainty and a tension in there as well. I find it's very intense. My local classical CD shop has probably got three racks of Gregorian chants, and it's much the same as being a rock music punter in terms of which one you get — which cover you like, where it was recorded.

I know that I am in the wrong business. I should be releasing records with Gregorian chant, with a rhythm loop and the sea underneath. When all else fails, I'll be there with my sea tape.

PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED **"Propleton" from a John Peel Radio One session (private tape)**

[Vocal comes in] Ah, I suspected so. It's this Wobble-era mix. It's a very strange mix. Sounds like Wobble was there at the mix so the bass gets really shoved to the front. I always thought it was a great shame that PIL didn't have more success. It was a real effort to do something different but I think it was too difficult for people — this era and *Flowers Of Romance*. It was a real effort to advance something and it didn't really sell that much. These days it's hard to imagine someone coming out of a successful band [like The Sex Pistols] and going and doing something like this in 1977, when all your peers were getting pilloried.

John Lyden was exhorting people to go out and buy your records. Well, with him and with everyone else, I don't really know about being influential apart from a certain attitude, which might indeed be if you've got a golden opportunity staring you in the face, the best thing to do is shoot yourself in the foot by doing something radically different or horrible — which I have had a certain tendency to do. Part of which is actually very good in terms of self-preservation and not losing it, I suppose. It was deeply depriving that [punk] was despised and swallowed up and made pastiche so quickly. My sympathies were

with it, but obviously being a musician for eight or nine years there was no point in trying to pretend to be part of it. But noise remains a part of what I like about doing this. So a lack of politeness will always go down well, I think. Too much politeness in music — whatever style of music it is — is usually very bad news.

SOFT MACHINE

"Lullaby Letter" from *Soft Machine* (Probe)

The bass doesn't sound in tune.

No, there's in the 'questionable intonation of the bass' period. [Referring to overdrown organ solo] It's not quite developed here, it just needs a little more nudge.

Well, Soft Machine were a great band. But the pop song, one felt, was never quite their forte. That's the unfair thing — in 67 those lyrics would not have seemed odd. I've got deeply embarrassing things in my treasure chest as well. Wyatt was obviously a great singer, but particularly once the organ sound was totally developed it was a really monumental experience. There was this strange cup of time where Soft Machine were going, we started some time after, and we were technically known — Arthur Brown and King Crimson as well — as 'underground' bands. At that point it was a broad description for anything that didn't fit in. In a way I don't know what audience we were aiming at but we didn't think about that sort of thing.

Hugh [Banton, Van Der Graaf's keyboard player] was the only other organist with a sound remotely comparable to [Mike] Ratledge's. Again because both organs were so severely mangled, with fuzzboxes inserted and bits of Seligman holding them together. He ended up designing one from scratch himself. Possibly they were the only two organs who were interested in making the organ go towards guitar and perhaps the fact that Soft Machine toured with Hendrix a few times in the States was influential. Both Hugh and I were very keen Hendrix fans and since the organs were the lead instruments in both bands maybe there was that temptation to go that way. Modern instruments have got much more capacity for lots of sounds but a Hammond being severely abused as Ratledge and Hugh did was a very full instrument which you can't synthesize successfully.

Did Van Der Graaf have any affinity with

their contemporaries in the so-called progressive scene?

Most progressive bands at the time were going towards this thing where, 'The show is the show. We will play these bits, they are impressive, they go widdly-widdly at this point in the set, everyone is impressed and it is being 'classical music', though it's rock music' — and so the shows would be the same. But with our shows — for better or worse — out of every five, two on average were completely appalling maelstroms of sound, organs and fuzz boxes airmo, sheets of feedback from the sax, the vocalist's voice has gone because he's just been shouting for two days. And then one would be fantastic, where everything was great. This was not the way generally that the world of progressive music was going. It was going down the line that to be fair to the audience, you have to present exactly this show everywhere you go and that isn't what we did. We were not trying to make it a shrine somehow.

SCOTT WALKER

"The Cockfighter" from *Fitz* (Fontana)

Not Scott Walker is it? I've not heard any of his recent stuff. It's been hovering around the consciousness for years that he's somebody who does interesting stuff. And obviously I know all of the great pop stuff. I thought there was something about the voice immediately. Very interesting. What era is this from? **The most recent album, *Fitz*.** I've been meaning to check this out and I'm not somebody who generally checks things out even as observation, but [Track ends] I don't think he's trying to make the album with Gregorian Chant and sea either — and good on him. And I think there's just got to be space. I think it's fantastic that he's still making records. As I say, I haven't checked out all of the career. I'm not a massive Scott fan, but he's a great singer. And in a way it's a bit like the equivalent of PIL — a post-car — but even more so. There's no reason why he's doing this apart from what he wants to do with it. He's not doing it subject to any other agenda. And since there's so much subject to other agendas, I think that's great.

There might be a parallel here in the fact that you've both taken very singular and uncompromising paths — except he only comes up with an album every ten years. It [Walker's music] requires attention. In

terms of parallels, when I make records I don't make them to be just in the background, either. Even though I pump them out every year as opposed to ten years, but I do listen to them and I do concentrate on them in an utterly unreasonable way. I think it can be a positive thing for some music to be background but that's not really what I think it's for. It should be concentrated on, and that makes it difficult exactly because you don't get it all straight away. I think if there's value it will take four or five times.

THE FALL

"Paranoian Man In Cheap Suit Room" from *The Infatuation Scan* (Permanent)

What era is this from? I think there should always be a place for Mark Smith. I didn't get a before the 'uh-oh's [imitates Smith]. He's certainly got a style which is all his own. Some of it is a bit of a rant, but some is really well written. And here's someone who pumps out records even more regularly than me. He used to be in touch with me and send me the vinyl as it came out, but I haven't heard from him for a while. He suggested that we did something — the area of sound that he was particularly interested in was *The Future Now* [1978] which is a particularly difficult area to recreate.

So you were thinking of doing a collaboration?

Yes, with Scott on backing vocals! And of course the seal it didn't happen in the end. I'm a bit of a control freak, with those of us generally that are survivors, there is a degree of control-freakery. For myself, I prefer to do instant collaborations. I'm not really interested spending six months labouring on something. And I'm not keen on the fabulous jam session.

One of Scott Walker's musicians has said that in the aborted sessions for his album with Daniel Lanois and Ennio, Walker was visibly uncomfortable as soon as they walked in because he felt his control was under threat.

Which is fair enough. If that's what it takes to allow you to carry on, you have to go with it. A producer will give you sound whatever happens to be at the moment, a contemporary, better sound and therefore you'll reach more people and prove yourself and so you might be more successful. If you come out of the

(Continued on page 67)



darkness

at the edge of town “C

leveland spreads out around the head of the Cuyahoga River. The steel mills, refineries, and chemical works of the Rust Belt are hunkered down along the crazy snaking riverbanks. They wait for the good days to return. The good days won't. At the head of the river is John D. Rockefeller's first warehouse. The place is empty since the year 1976, housing a dark and dank, abandoned space where sailors wait for the sales from off the lake. Every day, the wind blows in great piles of trash heaps just across the street. Here, Mbu played nearly every week for a year.

Thursday night in the Flatlands. At the edge of the world, if you want there it's because you knew what you were doing. There was no chance of tourists stumbling in...

"These were intoxicating days spent adrift in the ancient ruins of the industrial Midwest."

— from *The Olden Mbu Collection*, Version 0.0.0.0

"Ubu" can only exist because the characters within it are extremely temperamental, no, volatile, and it can only exist if we continue to give the ground. We don't accept repetition." — David Thomas, 1978

In 1975, **Pere Ubu** emerged from Ohio's industrial wastelands and were soon producing some of the most original rock music ever heard. On the eve of the release of their new album, Mark Sinker scrolls back through the career of the group that turned base metal into futurist gold

Datanank In The Year Zero (*Roads*, 1978)

"Maybe you see further than I can see." On the cover a girl sits on a car-hood with cranes behind her — an image out of Bruce Springsteen, but fabulously, eerily real. She's the brightest object, in mid-view, yet we register everything before we register her: the factory-scapes, the dashboard lights. And when we see her it's as some weird-phenomena photo, ectoplasmic manifestation at the site of a recent traffic accident. The world from a different angle: we cruise through ominously alluring industrial terrain peopled with shadowy figures somehow only leaning in from other dimensions. "Ahead the dim blur of an alien land/Time to give ourselves into strange gods' hands."

Pere Ubu were formed in Cleveland, Ohio in 1975. David Thomas, Peter Laughner and Tim Wright (soon to leave for New York and Andy Lindsay's DNA) had been associated with a group called Rocket From The Tomb. Scott Kraus and Tom Herman lived in the same apartment house as Laughner (as did Tony Marmone, Wright's replacement). The house was partly owned by Allen Ravenstine. In September 1975 the group recorded the single "3D Seconds Over Tokyo"/"Heart Of Darkness." It was a visionary first step, yet rooted firmly in its time.

From the start they wanted the powers, dreams and desires of ordinary Metal to be a vehicle for adult emotion: not teen-just, not silly fun and — crucially — not doomsday-poet posturing (the drugs-related death of the self-destructive Laughner, who left the group in '76, wised them up here). But they didn't reach for officially validated non-teen forms, like folk or soul or country or jazz. "Rock," Thomas has said since, "has always been about the application of power at the proper points. The wedding of mind and body, the physical as well as the emotional or spiritual or intellectual. Or rock music is a particular sort of repetitive, essentially non-melodic powerchording thing, one-chord-and-make-it-work." The *Datanank* EP, an anthology of the early Cleveland singles, capers, cruises and builds. No moment is wasted, no instrument coasts, they are incredibly disciplined.

"From this point on the musical clues are gone. The references are oblique. There are few band photos. They show you pictures of where they live but you hardly ever see pictures of them." — from *The Official Ubu Communes Version Of Events*

The Modern Dance (*Blank*, 1978)

It opens with a rising mechanical whine, a thrilling, cancerous sound that feeds off itself: after a pensive but precise little bass figure, the guitar arrives, like Chuck Berry in reverse: not a full-throttle dash for pleasure but a frantic back-paddling out of it. Except it's carried over the brink anyway.

"Non-Alignment Pact" is a love song but it's also about power. It brings a new kind of language to songwriting, borrowed from politics, that reaches back into the world and changes our understanding of that politics. Though Alfred Jarry's Pa Ubu could be a figure from blues mythology — a modernist Punch, a grotesque hedonist, angered and terrorised by his own passions and a world's brute indifference — the French symbolist poet unleashed this monster into current affairs, as a part of his philosophy of "pataphysics, the 'science of imaginary solutions' Ubu becomes king, in all his obscene, malevolent human-ness, and his country becomes a torture garden of hooks and pulleys and evil machinery.

Lust is real in these ten songs, but a side issue: there's also terror, doubt, intelligence, humour, boredom and dizzy pleasure — and not always a way to tell them apart. The animal and the mechanical in adult emotion are not easy to untangle nor herd mentality and civic responsibility, nor working for society's utopian transformation and for its chaotic downfall. "Chinese Radiator" looks forward to a revolution that will sweep the singer away in its drive for purity and security. Ravenstine's BML synthesizer, a rare, analogue machine, pulses into sandstorm hiss that becomes pounding surf that becomes crowds cheering. We know what the words

mean, we can't quite grasp the Ubu attitude — ironic and detached? Doomswitch? Celebratory? — but this is because we can't quite grasp our own. As the boundaries between intrusive machine-noise, human communal response and instinctive animal-kingdom bark have become unclear, so have the clear value-lines we thought we'd long ago set down within us.

As for Thomas, who at this point was referring to himself as Crocus Behemoth and who may or may not be Pa Ubu, his singing is as unlikely as the way he looked: totally physical, totally uncanny, a pulsing, prancing, oversized brain gorging itself on the energy sparking all round it. As if intelligence was his flesh.

"A lien always said they were a folk band. You can see why. Remember that the whole scene in 1974, even counting all the part-time musicians, sometime sound men, wives, girlfriends, hangers-on and friends of friends, amounted to not much more than 50 people. It was a small, isolated society living in a space as isolated as any pioneer outpost on the plains of Kansas. And they identified with the land. Except the land wasn't rural: it's like they'd stumbled into a lost world where the sun would set, the inhabitants flee and the stones of the bridges, buildings and monuments whisper in the timeless dark, speaking in a dead language of the hopes and dreams and fears of the fathers. The vision was powerful. They were young." — from *The Official Ubu Communes Version Of Events*



Dub Housing (*Chrysalis*, 1978)

The Modern Dance is a clear enough title: it could almost be a *Best Of* from an age yet to come, a precognitive Nuggets for the 90s. But what did *Dub Housing* mean? "Housing" as in sheltered housing? Engine-housing? And "Dub"? As you probed for answers you came up against a powerfully willful refusal to make things easy.

All that ever stopped them from 'looking out' on record since was their own conscious choice. All the sectors of

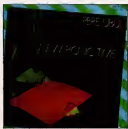
"Navy", the opener, have careered momentum. But it deliberately stops and starts the whole time, and every song follows this pattern, as rhythmically unstoppable moments are linked in ways that break all rules of flow.

You also get the impression that if any one element in the mix at any one time was omitted — the flybuz synth off this track, the discomforting singing off that one — the rest would sound sweet and hard and fine (choruses, hooks and riffs flow in unvanquishable number: only to be dubbed on the hoard, drowned or walled up in the cellar). The classic rock collective being unsettling exactly in its collectivity, any smaller grouping or permutation within it, rocking and saleable and fun. But exhaustion, tedium and routine stalked the straight-ahead form for those who stuck with it, while mere cult success was a trap that full-on 'experimenterals' all around were falling into.

To offset their perversity there emerged an interest in low budget studio-manipulation as aural horrorshow. "Thriller" is put together from layers of backwards, slowed-down and otherwise treated voices, guitars, drums. A spoken swirl of sound, it gradually succumbs to the gnawing and stomping of mutant termites. *Dub Housing* more or less coincided with David Lynch's *Eraserhead* in some scenes, the film's central character, played almost squeaky with flight by Jack Nance, looked uncannily like Thomas. (For the record, the album's title was later revealed to have been inspired by Baltimore's "echo-ike" terraced housing.)



PHOTO CHRIS PILLMEYER
In November 78, Ubu returned to tour in the UK. A London audience bought tickets for the "Magical Mystery Ubu Tour", boarded buses to an unknown destination and found themselves in Chislehurst Caves watching Ubu play on an improvised stage in a hole in the cavern's chalk walls. — from *The Official Ubu Communion Version Of Events*



New Picnic Time

(Chrysolis, 1979)

The oddest, roomiest, most elliptical record they ever made, *New Picnic Time* nonetheless dispenses with the cranky stop-start made songs. It's a series of contrasting mood pieces, about waiting in mighty dread for the Coming of the Kingdom, and about what things might be like when it came. Just as "Chinese Radiation" had been, in a way, but that song's chilling serenity has been supplanted — as the LP's title suggests — by an

amused playfulness about the lay of the Promised Land, and about delays to its arrival and humanity's responses ("Jumbo Bumbo Jagerty Jumbo," they chant at one point) and secret assumptions. Blasphemous? Blissful? The words Thomas sings seem to be channeled through him from all sources but himself: as if he's become a kind of radio-receiver, in heaven, for those not yet there and for those there who haven't realized it. His vocal delivery, though, is not a ghost's wail but a child's, a thrilled improvisation with tools newly acquired: lungs, lips, tongue, language. Birds sing, albeit suspiciously mechanical ones. Ideas that ought to be heartening seem curiously threatening and vice versa. "This is the voice of the sand/There is far more sand than land." "Goodbye," which gave its name to what would only be the first of many Farewell Tours, is perhaps the most eerily beautiful thing they ever recorded.

In 1979 started out well with a concert at the conceptual birthplace of the avant-garage, the First International Garage Exhibition, but the end game was at hand. Nothing fit into place. Nobody spoke the same language. Tom was frustrated and left after a summer tour which ended in a vast beachside hall in San Diego playing for an audience of five. It felt bad. Weeks passed with the band in limbo. David and Allen met at the concert of a celebrated New Wave group. "We were better," David said. "Maya Thompson," Allen answered. A month later Ubu was rehearsing with the guitarist from The Red Crayola. — from *The Official Ubu Communion Version Of Events*

The Art Of Walking (Rough Trade, 1980)

Just because everyone thinks it, doesn't mean it wasn't true: tricky Maya Thompson is no real substitute on guitar for blue-collar blues-giant Tom Herman. By contrast with the mottable *Acric*, *Walking's* Great Leap Forwards has been overpraised, possibly a belated and slightly embarrassed response to a group as it begins to wind up. This is the first release to suffer the drawbacks of absolute non-repetition. As rich in isolated ideas (about texture, juxtaposition, phrasing, what a riff is, what a hook is) as any of its predecessors, and less out than it seemed at the time (but perhaps also less impressive), its dynamic is towards fragmentation, but the devotion to the majesty of the stumble and the tumble is in danger of becoming an inverted and complacent koddietalk (Shoes and fishes and birds multiply in the lyrics, electric waves recede).

"The smallest victories are often the biggest," Thomas sings in "Gr". What does that mean? We should be happy with what we have? With where we are? This suggestion — and it's harder to fix on solidly than it is to think you're gleaming it — is probably what set them apart from the times: certain suspicion-toggles appeared to have been switched off. If they were turning towards folk and even jazz (Hiles gets a mention) it was a mistake: it looked as if they were trying to borrow cultural credibility, were putting their earlier achievements in question as regards rock as a sound and a source.

The idea that we were harming ourselves by being out of alignment with our animal nature ("The birds are saying what I want to say") was surely not the point: they were making, but that's how everyone read it, fan and foe alike. To Thomas, feet, hands and hat were so many independent animist gods: he sang more a song of floppy disconnection rather than higher harmony. The real idea here might have been that we were out of alignment with animals, machines and our own body parts, but this was much too complicated for the smuggy PC phase that post-punk had entered.

390° Degrees Of Simulated Stereo: Ubu Live Volume One (Rough Trade, 1981)

A slightly pointless if reassuringly jagged live compendium (the originals — all from *Datapanik and Dance* — invariably being so charged and titanic, and with better sound), these versions did at least prove that Ubu's negotiation in and out of free-form breakdown and their unerring self-discipline weren't mere studio trickery. Three tracks from the last show by a Peter Laughner/Tim Wright Ubu line-up in 1976 are historically intriguing without being terribly good. But the sleeve notes are fun. "The WHK Auditorium, aka Disastodrome, is a unique venue: a crumbling radio theater located on the edge of the inner city. One outlet supplies an electrical current that can only barely be considered to be under control. Cracked steam pipes and big sparks provide special effects. Winsos lend a Voice of Doom to the proceedings from out of the dark fringes."

Song Of The Bailing Man (Rough Trade, 1982)

Recorded by a weaned group on the point of packing it in, *Bailing Man* was roasted on delivery and pretty soon Ubu had gone the way of punk and its aesthetic platform. Even so, the record's aged rather better than expected: their bad day now seems more creative than some groups' best decade. With former Lounge Lizard, fellow-Cleveland and Datapanik-dedicative Anton Fier on clickety-click drums, Fake Jazz was the order of the day. As were anti-ideology, non-purposeful activity and the celebration — in "Petrified" — of the vanished dinosaur. "The fluid grace and subtlety of animals (first perfectly) into a world not like the one we see." There's a certain melancholy self-interest at work here — they'd soon be extinct themselves — but generosity towards those tossed into history's ash-heaps is usually attractive. "Thoughts that go by steam on met with jubilation."

An aside, perhaps part of the same thing, perhaps not: a strange, unsigned Ubu-joke had started on *Housing* with a song called "Drinking Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee" that certainly wasn't Sock McGhee's 1949 chunk of proto-R&B, though it had the same name. Ubu liked to title tracks which only they could have written in revisionary homage to mainstream pop classics. "Stormy Weather" here and also perhaps, "West Side Story." *Bailing Man* is slight, but some of it's fun as well, once you learn not to expect too much.

Trouble was coming. Ugly personal squabbles [had] plagued the *Song Of The Bailing Man* sessions. A miserable writer's tour of the US finished the group off.

Ubu had run its course. No attempt was made to revitalize the project. No one phoned. No one spoke. No one wanted to know. Months passed. Sometime in 1982 Ubu stopped ... — from *The Official Ubu Commuter Version Of Events*

The Tenement Year (Fontana, 1988)

One day, years later, they woke up and realised they'd reformed by mistake. A fan in Fontana's A&R department got them a major deal, with all the foolishness and possibility that entailed. Their picture appeared on the sleeve, a first. (They looked pompous, a bad sign.)

Always, in the past, a new Ubu LP was structured in response to its predecessor, and how you might have been led to mistake the group's essence. *Tenement* was clearly none of its predecessors, but it kicked off less from the problems of rewinning established identity than starting over from nothing. And yet, though it's not just a collection of songs trudging along after the last such, it is still, primarily, a mere collection. Full of ideas (of course) it still seemed more pent-up rush than honed project. The sound is attractively dry and clustered, the introduction of a melodeon is

inspired: songs pile up in one direction then flicker off utterly elsewhere. Jim Jones, former Electric 66

and fellow Clevelanders, was
some kind of
substitute
for

Herman. A couple of cuts developed a too-long discarded sense of mysterious dimensions and perilous forces lurking behind ordinary life. Charred half-hooks hang round half-burned, brought to glow by repeated play, but how much of this was it getting? Fans and critics, maybe. Outsiders? Newcomers?

There was one straight grabber: "George had a hat. But it wasn't where it wasn't at", a one-line song that Thomas babbled over and over (when he wasn't playing trombone, another first). And you yakked along, though its paradox was a little too cute in its turning aside of hipness and/or historical significance. Revisionary pop classic. "Miss You" (Rolling Stones, 1978). "It had a hard day's night," is how Ubu's "Miss You" begins.

Cloudland (Fontana, 1989)

Even the words didn't stop "Breath" sounding like middling-quality Springsteen (although, if the Boss has arms and legs that flip-flop, he's never shared the fact with us). Which was a surprise and certainly no repetition, and brave and earnest and even charming, in a way. Ubu taking a pop career seriously and making amends for former self-indulgent cussedness. But though *Cloudland*, if played on a big enough system, has a not-unpleasant sentimental grandeur, all that's really proved by this almost fatuously lush mix is how limited the possibilities within Big Rock Sound are. There are hooks — naturally — but they're mired in an over-layered ruin of mush. In

the old days a hundred groups could have based whole careers on Ubu's leavings (one idea each), could have flourished without even resembling one another. Why Ubu should choose to resemble U2 or Talking Heads seemed less conceptual enigma, more clumsy sell-out. (Or worse, burn-out. Even the hooks were second-hand: "Waiting For Mary" was "David Watts".)

And yet, on side two small things started to break up this seamless surface: from the lithe electro-pop



spine of "Love Love Love" (the fossil of a Laughner-era Ubu song "Can't Believe It") Out of nowhere, in "Lost Nation Road," the former Crocus Behemoth (surely art rock's Anti-Elvis) suddenly — briefly — hit into the Hillbilly Cat's deep throbs. For a moment the whole group looked to raise the ghost of Sun's High Lonesome but what ensued was only a listing of place names (Nevada, Kansas, Texas, the Eiffel Tower) rather than invocation of associated recording spaces: the idea of magic rather than magic itself. Revisionary Pop Classic "Cry" (Johnny Ray, 1951).

One Man Drives While The Other Man Screams:

Ubu Live Volume Two (Rough Trade, 1989)

390' had promised a second (and third) volume of live versions of songs off *Housing and Pining*, and put out a call for good quality tapes of shows in a succession of American cities, plus the following: "All tapes submitted to Ubu Communes will be returned with some little gagewag as a token of appreciation." It was a long time coming, many had given up on it. It was also strong, a reminder that they could rock when they wanted, even on songs where they once hadn't remotely chosen to. There were more songs from *Dontopank* and *Waiting than Pining* (a solitary "Small Was Fast," with Mayo Thompson not Herman) from only three locales — two not on the original request list — and all officially recorded, through the desk. Utopian documentary accuracy sacrificed for, well, power. But this is an astounding record if their future was over, their past sure wasn't finished yet. So where's the volume three?



Worlds In Collision

(Fontana, 1991)

Worlds In Collision refers to the theories of Immanuel Velikovsky, who devoted his life to proving that the literal truth of the Bible was compatible with up-to-date 1950s physics and chemistry, invoking a series of spectacular near-misses in the planetary procession: such events as the parting of the Red Sea were the result of Mars or Venus lurching out of proper orbit and hurtling past Earth, to significant but

unprecedented gravitational effect.

Such a theory, worthless as history or astronomy, is nonetheless a nice metaphor for the effects of Planet Rock as it whirled past Planet Jazz in the mid-50s, of Planet Punk spinning past Planet Pop in the 70s. Those restricted to respective surfaces had no satisfactory explanation for what had just occurred. Once Ubu had known that they were a minor asteroid themselves, weaving and spinning a dance between all major bodies. Now they seemed to have been captured by just one, its orbit decaying fast.

Worlds is not entirely bland failure, though the preponderance of jangly guitar, smothering synth and dulled 4/4 beats as *überflavour* is a big downside: electronic scribbles and sax man Allen Ravenstine was now only a "guest musician." An upside might be Thomas's recommitment to proper singing, though his models seemed more often Chris Rea or Dwight Yoakam — avatars of chest-sobbing maturity — than anyone who could help him refocus his own stop-dead-and-TWINK approach. The mood throughout is C&W-yearning — working folks want out — which might be specious and condescending if it wasn't so helplessly autobiographical. The lyric-fragment quoting has become an epidemic: no song is without its famous, appropriated pop line. Within the big, ungagged, harmonically unthreatening sound that Fontana was presumably requiring of them, they still sometimes pulled cross-dimensional shifts, more often "quirky" now than spark, but with just enough spark to keep you hoping. Revisionary Pop Classics "Goodbye Irene" (Leadbelly, 1940s), plus "Honor Plan" (Beethoven, 1968) for faithful undergrounders.

41 [The Ubu idea] is that sound is visual, that sound has great power to express the unexpressable. To describe things that words can't describe. That's the essence of it. We see sound as form of cinema that struck a resonance with the things around us then, in our twenties, late teens — an environment that had an intense effect upon us, living in a particular period in the history of a world, in the history of a country, in the history of a culture" — David Thomas, 1993



Story Of My Life

The title — perhaps the least groic since *Dance* — handed on a neatly comprehensible structure which any throw-together bag of fragments could be hung on scenes from a life, conventional biopic or subversive avant garde critique of same. This was the first important success of Story. What's more, the beginning of a sundering of relations with Fontana threw them back into

relationship with themselves alone a salutary shock (some folks are just born to be on small labels).

The opener, "Wasted," functions as sharp self-crit: "We were throwing time away/irrevocably" goes the chant-chorus: it seems to encompass 1979 as much as 1989. But the first, best sign of health is the move from accordion and close-miked voice, at Thomas's quiet command "Rock!" to dense, wailing, unapologetic Metal, simultaneously unrestrained and contained (it stops as abruptly as it appears). Then there's Thomas's compelling offhandedness during "Louisiana Train Wreck." He isn't preaching any more, he's simply describing: in this instance, how a site of public calamity might also be a place of private erotic significance. A chastened Ubu may have more to tell us about desires, dreams and powers than many an uncompromised group of puny experimentalists.

Story is a queer moment, promising without being totally successful. Thomas is at the top of his form and enjoying it (check his Emo Phillips imitation in the title track) but the group seem to have to be formally jolied into being surprising. "Postcard" has a fabulous, rolling electric sound but doesn't go anywhere, "Kathleen" is essentially an XTC song, several songs outstay their welcome, instruments coast. Revisionary Pop Classic "Story Of My Life" (Paul Anka, 1961) — which may just be coincidence, and a sign this correspondence is closing.

Ray Gun Suitcase

(Cooking Vinyl, 1995)

In "Laughing," long ago, Thomas sang, "We can live in the empty spaces of this [for] away, the stars are coming all undone/Oh, but that's for away! We're young! The Devil comes, we'll shoot him with a gun!" He's not young now and those empty spaces may seem bleaker. Is this what "Electricity" is saying? "Above in the sky the stars come undone/below in the city there's nothing but strange talk that feels like all the faded hopes that never were." Another song is called "Folly Of Youth," on the surface a doleful love song, it's about artistic ambition and realistic achievement. "I am to be your ray pistol/wanna light the way across your starless, lonely nights! /I am to be a success/wanna hang around inside your Greyhound terminal."

In the beginning, Ubu were rarely as oblique as they seemed. They stopped making sense only when they began fighting to communicate, to speak a chart pop language they didn't yet believe in. They had been — for a while, for long enough — one of the most original rock groups that ever existed as if The Band, in 1966, had ended their tours with Bob Dylan by deciding to invent an urban American music based not in borrowed sketches of the rural past but in muted fragments of the city future. But the ruthless changes they took with their own possible meaning began winking in a sea of corporate pop culture's market-tailored assumptions, and one day sink down beyond their reach.

Pop culture has since entered Ubu-language: it's no longer a problem for them in "The Beach Boys" Thomas vows to burn his shoes (it) but also "the glorified home of the blues"; elsewhere, their first proper cover-version, "Sister Girl," a Beach Boys song in "Turquoise Fire" Elvis fans are saluted, those who sneer at them denounced. *Suitcase* explores faith and loss and rage and age, the inevitable onset of human frailty, the existence of contradictory needs and (Ubu turns anti-Ubu) the acute grimness of defeat and failure and dinosaur-dom. Though the group is no longer as dantly warped or inventive, it's never boring and often beautiful. □

Pere Ubu's new album, *Ray Gun Suitcase*, is released this month by Cooking Vinyl (through Vital). A box set containing the bulk of Pere Ubu's recordings will be released later this year by Geffen. Pere Ubu e-mail: pereubu@perexdemon.com.uk



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Ry Cooder on stage in London, July 1995

Ry Cooder is probably the most influential and popular film composer to have emerged in recent times. From *Paris, Texas* to *Geronimo*, his intimate, impressionistic scores have spawned a host of imitators. In this extended interview, Cooder talks to Jonathan Romney about his work with directors Wim Wenders, Walter Hill, Nic Roeg, Louis Malle and others

tracking across the screen

The story goes that there's a school of soundtrack musicians known collectively in the trade as "Wry Cooders". They specialise in music to accompany shots of godsaken diners in Arizona, dusty highways winding up into the distant hills and angrily puffed-up monitor boards captured in close-up. And the music they produce — for beer ads, car ads, jeans ads — is carbon-copy pastiche of the distinctively forlorn slide guitar sound that Ry Cooder created for Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas*.

The Wenders music, which Cooder created in four days flat in 1984, is Cooder's best-known and most imitated sound but he has a considerable body of influential film work besides, quite apart from his successful career as a solo artist, which he's now placed on hold. Cooder's film work goes back to the late 1960s when he worked on Christian Marquand's now forgotten sex satire *Candy* and, more notably, on Donald Cammell and Nicholas Roeg's *Performance*, which featured one of the great iconic moments of rock cinema — Mick Jagger's sneering, menacing and supremely perverse reading of the song "Mama From Turner".

A new double CD, *Music By Ry Cooder*, collates the best of Cooder's solo work for film, including scores for Wenders, Tony Richardson, Louis Malle and above all, Walter Hill, with whom he's worked since *The Long Riders* (1980). Cooder may often be associated with the good ol' boy fringe of West Coast rock but his film work occupies another universe, demonstrating how adventurous a lateral thinker he can be. For Hill's *Trespass* (1992) he worked with Jon Hassell to create an edgy, abrasive and impressionistic score that owed nothing to the clichés of the gangster thriller genre but did provide an appropriately tense setting for its stars Ice T and Ice Cube. Most recently, Hill's *Geronimo: An American Legend* allowed Cooder to rethink the tradition of scoring for Westerns, to incorporate traditional American hymnals, Elmer Bernstein-style orchestral and Twain throat singers.

JR There's a quote from Walter Hill on the sleeve of the *Music By Ry Cooder* CD: he says about your film music, "Suffice it to say that it doesn't work in the traditional manner, doesn't underscore as much as it envelops, doesn't heighten the moment as much as it adds to the atmosphere, surrounds the story, supplies missing information, champions the mood rather than the event." Is that a fair appraisal?

RC [Draws deep breath] Well, it's all good! He thinks so, so that's good enough for

me. [Laughs] Looking over the work that I've done for him you would hope that it was so. I think... he knows what he's talking about!

What you do in film is a bit of a dying art in Hollywood because it's increasingly rare that a whole movie would be scored by one person, it's much more common to buy in a song from here and there and put it all out on a compilation LP.

It's a different kind of structure now. Packaged scores and packaged in the acting and the writing and the craft services and I don't know what-ah! But I used to write these tunes, for instance in *The Border*, used to write 'em because somebody said, "Put a song in." Nowadays they wouldn't bother with that, they would get a Music Supervisor to get some hit songwriter, so it's a little different deal.

That's something that's quite rare for you in your film work, that you'll work on a song which relates to the story of the film, that tells a story in itself?

Well, I've always thought it's a good idea to do that, because I could see opportunities for songwriting that would help the theme, that would do something for a moment in the picture when nothing was going on, or not enough was going on. There was one song that I wrote for *The Border* that was eight minutes long. [It was for a scene where Jack Nicholson goes out and beats up a bunch of people and gets beaten up and that's all you see, so there isn't much to look at. Really. And then he staggers home.]

John Hiatt came down to sing. I had actually called Mick Jagger to come and sing this tune — I thought, "Well, why the hell not?" Well, he's in the shower. He says, "I'm busy, I can't." So I call Hiatt up, I say, "John, you know Jagger won't sing this?" "Oh, fuck him. I'll come down and do it." He got in a car, his beat-up Volvo, and he drove down. "Give me the lyrics." He's really sorry. He got in the vocal booth and just did it, put the lyrics down, got in his car and went home. That's scoring, you know.

You've been working in film since the late 60s, but you started out working with Jack Nitzsche, who was a long-term Phil Spector associate, and you worked on Candy and Performance. What was it like working with Nitzsche, what did he teach you?

I knew him as a record producer and as a friend. He says, "I'm gonna do this movie music now: this guy's made this film [Nic Roeg, *Performance*]. Jagger's in it, and there's a song and it's a pretty weird movie, they want me to do the music." I said, "Oh, that's interesting, gee." So he says, "Come on down and we'll get started." So I got my

**“ Nic Roeg goes: Fantastic!
What you've done for this
scene is incredible! How
you've made these actors
portray and work. I thought:
OK. I can do this. ”**



guitars and drove down there.

"We were still using screen projection — didn't have video like they do now, they would roll the film. It was a pretty good sized screen, in this big old studio, and Nitzsche'd be shuffling his score paper and making notes, and I'm sitting there and this scene comes up and he says, 'Well, do it.' Shuffling. And I say, 'Well, I don't know, whaddya think I oughta do, Jack?' Nic Roeg came over and said, [adopts lofty tone] 'This scene is incredibly sad, it's so tragic because this man and this woman — and what they're feeling and what they're thinking.' He went on, this long thing. I went, 'Oh God, no. I don't understand.' Jack says, 'Just play bottleneck, all right? You don't have a lot of time.' OK, here I go. But I found this is kind of cool: watch and see and play. And then wait. And then watch and see and play. Somebody gets up and moves, then some little look in the face and go for that. [Laughs] Roeg goes, 'Fantasize! What you've done for this scene is incredible! How you've made these actors portray and work, what I've never believed and I didn't think.' I thought, 'OK. I can do this.'

The long-term relationship you've had in film is with director Walter Hill: you've done eight or nine films with him now? The first was *The Long Riders* (1980) — apparently he just called you up out of the blue? Called me up, yeah. I'd made a record that he'd liked and I had an ensemble effect that he thought was pertinent to *The Long Riders*, that is to say *The Long Riders* was about his vision of community rule, communities in the South in the post-Civil War era, where families were together. There was nothing to do, the South had been vanquished — it was like Vietnam vets, that was the allegory there. He said these guys would go out and rob banks and trains — that's how they supported themselves, it was an honorable thing. They fought the Pinkertons and the banks, and the North was in the process of sort of acquiring all these little Southern towns, the people had nothing they could do about it, no one was very happy about it. So it's a sort of interesting American story.

What the communities were like nobody can say now. Nobody's alive who remembers what it felt like to live then. But the music would be part of the [fabric], at a wedding or at a fight or something. So he said this

record I'd made, it would work as a template [just] move it over to this film. I looked at it and I said, 'Yeah, I think I can reconstruct that, we'll make up some tunes, play some old-time American instruments, just get a little feeling going and then watch and see.' This using music that's come down, that is sort of authentic, and working with it a little bit. He liked it. And the more I took liberties with it, the better he liked it.

In a way you leap in at the deep end there, doing a Western first of all, because you can do what you like with a thriller theme and with a romance — no one knows what they sound like — but everyone knows what a Western movie soundtrack sounds like. They know after Aaron Copland and their Ferdinand Grofé, but Walter says don't do that. Why replicate or continue to clone that off? So I figured, go into what people play, what they sounded like, what the instruments were — out of tune, broken maybe, unpolished, in other words, everything I was used to. In a Western context it's great because the payoff is we don't know what they did. We know what they did at the Grand Ole Opry now but it's got nothing to do with what they did back then. You've returned to that, with a bit of a departure, on *Geranno*, where you're working with orchestras and Tuvan throat singers.

[The problem there was] what are we going to do? We've got the Indians and we've got the white people, the soldiers, and neither side is all right or all wrong. You can't, as [Hill] said, valise one and not the other. You can't say the soldiers were heroic because that's a horrible mess that they caused, and you can't say the Indians were saintly because they were bloodthirsty and cruel — and yet in defence of their life and their land. So something has to balance here, each side has to have a voice. I figured,

“For *Blue Collar* I got Beefheart to come out of the desert. Locked him in a room and went through all kinds of hell to get him to sing the whole song once. He's the most incorrigible, difficult guy in the world.”

sure. 19th century white church music, what we call shaker note regular settler community church singalong type thing, orchestrated for, well, it's got a 200 mile sweep in this scene, and here comes 200 cavalry down there, they're about 50 miles away, we gotta fill up all that room, you can't twang on a guitar and expect it to work, somebody has to get some air moving. But then what are the Indians going to sound like? I can't do

that. No white guy from Santa Monica can be the strange, alien, primitive man voice. And our Indian music that we know about today has turned out to be somebody plays the flute and somebody chants, and that's not gonna work. Except in little isolated bits because it isn't really musical, it's so ritualized.

Then I heard some Tuvan throat music. I think it's got something to do with the way



the human larynx was first shaped and people found they could do something besides grunt. They could make a tone. We think of the eight-note scale, the octave, the triad, but I don't think they knew that then. I think they knew this harmonic series, I think it's five notes. They make it in their bodies, of course—they didn't have wood for instruments and no one said, make an instrument. The voice is the instrument, the body's the instrument, so they make another octave from here [gesturing], they make another from here and then the top octave comes out of their head. And I saw these guys from Tuva, on some cultural exchange, do this. This high whistling note: where's that coming from? The man is sending it out of his head, it's as loud as anything I've ever heard: some tiny trumpet. Then [singing deep note], baaa, he goes down into the stomach, as loud as anything you ever heard — just this little Mongolian guy. So I said, 'Walter, check this out. You're down in Utah, in the Monument Valley. When you go to the shoot in the morning, you drive your jeep — or your driver does — put this in the tape player when the sun's coming up and check it out.' Baa-aaa-raa — this weird thing, with a tune, a primitive man tune.

You like to mix your cultural references because I noticed in the instrumentation to Hill's Southern Comfort (1981) you've got all the Bayou sounds, the accordion, but you've also got Japanese shakuhachi. Oh yeah, because it's obviously a Samurai picture. To me it is. So once you see that

it's hard not to want to do it. I also have a tabla player in there. "Sounds like Sheena, Queen Of The Jungle," Walker said. "Oh no, why does he think that? Oh, it's the tabla." I mixed that down and "That's better," he said, "Sheena's gone." But he would enjoy the process of having me sit there and just fool around until something started to sound right. It sometimes took weeks. Now, most people wouldn't tolerate that. They say, "Upper left hand corner at nine in the morning, I want you out of here at six. The film is scored."

For Paris, Texas, with Wim Wenders, you had four days.

Three to record and one to mix down. He was in a hurry. He was quite nervous about the whole process, wasn't he?

Oh, he was uptight. That poor man. He knew he had a masterpiece, no doubt about it. And he had to get it out for Cannes, he knew he could win. He didn't have any money, didn't have any time. Fortunately we hit upon this idea and I said, "This will work. You don't have a thing to worry about." But he was pacing back and forth in the control room of the recording studio, and he sees me and two other guys [pianist Jim Dickinson and multi-instrumentalist David Lindley] and he figures, no way. If I do the wrong thing, he thinks [imitates Wenders's German accent] "I fear I don't control the music." I said, "Well, just relax then, let me do this. I'll do the title cue. I have to run around and play the bass mimbba and then Lindley will saw away on this thing and if you don't like it then we'll reconnoiter. But just sit still while I do this title cue." So I did

Paris, Texas



and everything was cool and we went ahead! It was pretty easy. *Has that score been a bit of an albatross for you, because that must be the most irritating guitar sound ever every time you see the diner in the desert you've got that guitar sound.*

That and the damn Volkswagen commercials and everything. [Laughs] I don't want to replicate it and keep doing it over and over again, but it's just blues, really. It worked because there was empty space and this sad man who doesn't speak. It was Wenders who said "Blind Willie Johnson — do that." But of course, it's one thing to do that and another to make it work cinematically. It has to change and grow and be somehow evolving like the story does, in little, tiny ways. That was the easy one. If we hadn't hit upon that idea it would have been horrible. You could run that film, go in 20 different directions and never get it right. But he knew what he wanted. So long as they know what they want, it's cool.

As someone who's particularly associated with very American sounds and the kind of American musical tradition that goes way back, what's it like working with European directors who have their own specific anxieties about America that they're working out on screen? Like Louis Malle, for instance?

Both Tony Richardson and Louis Malle were making films about American stories with *The Border* and *Alamo Bay*. Both those guys are very musically conscious, especially Tony, who had done weird musical things in his pictures, too. He told me he cut one score in somebody's kitchen. He was a fearless man, he didn't care what anybody thought. I'd known Louis Malle primarily from *Phantom India*, the documentary. He's got a good ear and a good eye for natural settings and atmosphere and, I would say, environments. So as long as I can see what the environment's sort of feeling like to me, and if I can connect with it, then I'm all right. He said, "Make it sound like a Chinese Western, Chinese John Ford music."

What is it in a movie that really gets you clicking? Do you tend to look at the narrative or the characters or the setting?

The story's important — I like stories. So if the story unfolds in a way that feels all right to me, then I get interested. Then I'm looking for the atmosphere and the environment because that's where I know the music will be. We did Brewster's Millions [Walter Hill, 1985] and I couldn't get that right no matter what I did. It's just a bunch of guys in a room. And then another room. And it's funny or it's not funny. We made some little, light, rhythmic things happen and it was cute, but you look back on it now and it's a mess. What else could I do? There's another film you worked on with Jack Nitzsche again. Paul Schrader's *Blue Collar*. You were reunited with someone you had worked with very early on. Captain Beefheart on "Hard Working Man."

Yeah. We wrote the tune and I don't remember a whole lot about it except that [I wondered] who can sing this? Well, only Beefheart's got that kind of crazy low voice to put this across. I got him to come down out of the desert — it was the last time I saw him. Locked him in a room and went through all kinds of hell to get him to sing the whole song once. He's the most incoherent, difficult guy in the world. [Conducting imaginary dialogue with Beefheart.] I hate Hollywood. Those lights — I hate those lights. Who's that guy? That's just the producer, leave him alone. I hate producers' Just sing the song. I have to go to the bathroom. Just sing — the song. Jesus Christ! We locked the door. Actually did. 'Get me outta here,' he was yelling — banging the door with his fists. I said, 'You sing — when you can come out.' [Laughs] He put me through a lot of hell during the *Safe As Milk* days and I got off on that. [Laughs] I got him now! We got Beefheart now. But it was good.

*Another real departure for you recently was working on Trespas. It's got on Abrasive, much more urban sound, and it's interesting because it's almost a rap movie but not quite. You've got Ice T and Ice Cube in there and you could have gone for your version of *Menace II Society* but it's something different, and it's got Jon Hassell on trumpet.*

They had packaged these rap tunes. Walter said, I got a deal with this, this is the package. Like it or not, I don't know if these are good rap tunes or bad rap tunes, but that's not what the film's about. It's another Samurai story, as far as I could tell anyway, set in this abandoned factory. I said, 'I have a couple of new machines I'm playing with here that are weird, and Jim Keltner will come down and bang on some drums, and then there's this guy who plays this weird, seashell trumpet thing.' 'Well, fine,' Walter says. 'Just do it.'

They'd already scored the picture and then the [LA] notes hit and the studio would have nothing to do with it. So Walter [saw he had] some extra time [and decided to] rescure the film. Jon Hassell came down and made this alien junkie music, almost through the mouthpiece of his trumpet. In other words, here's these poor black guys, they're sad cases, they're terrible, neglected, abused, pitiful people, holed up in this building, and how they lived and how they think is like an alien race that you'd suddenly discover, almost like a science fiction movie. And that old boy Jon Hassell sat there and blew that sound, made that work, especially for the junkie kid who dies. That look on his face and the sound of the trumpet, it was a natural thing. I played my big floor slide with a flower vase that I had and made a big, rumbling, dangerous sound underneath, and Keltner played his bebop snare thing, and it worked pretty good. I think it's great, actually — a great job of work. It's another one of these fast things when you don't have much time to think. What exactly is the floor slide? It's about ten feet long, isn't it?

These New Age instrument people I met had been messing around with scale intervals, not tempered, going back to Pythagoras and other formulas for dividing up tone microtones. The ear deals with microtones, only our music somehow doesn't. Some other cultures do. Even, for instance, Persian music is quarter-toned. It gets to an emotional realm that Bach and those guys just sidestepped. They said, 'No, we like this whole step, half step, it's very clear, what we're doing is very mathematical.' That turned out to be the dominant thing. It's got something to do with the culture, that European decadent thing and the dominant piano. But if you go into other cultures, what they have at their disposal is the entire range.

So these guys, these New Age characters, took a long plank and they put ten steel strings on it. They drew some tape lines, here's your frets, here's your divisions, and they put a pickup in the thing. It's about ten feet long and it just sits there. It was at a New Age music convention, they had it in a hotel room. I stood there and looked at the thing and thought, 'This looks good.' 'Don't touch it! Nobody knows how to play it but us.' I said, 'Get out of my way. I know how to play this thing. Give me a jar, a vase, something.' I went, Neeaaaacow. The thing is so long that the harmonics change, they build and they increase and as you go up with the flower vase you [generate] this harmonic build-up until it sounds almost like something's going to explode. With a string that long every time the string is divided and then divided

“Jon Hassell came down and made this alien junkie music, I played my big floor slide with a flower vase, and Jim Keltner played his bebop snare thing. We had a lot of fun making this really awful, sad, scary picture.”

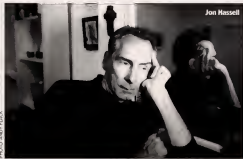


PHOTO: JAMES FLACK



The Border

trumpet and Keltner playing whatever came into his head. We had a lot of fun, making this really awful, sad, scary picture sound like, you know, there's music for this too, there's music for everything and every place and everywhere you go there's some music, as if it was piped in. Like, you go to the store and they're playing some disco music and you go to the bookstore and they've got some nice chamber music. But if you go to this factory, where people are killing each other, this is what is going on. The rap music is strictly secondary. The rap that's good is in the speaking that they do. Ice T and Ice Cube delivering these lines as actors, in a rhythmic way that most actors wouldn't be able to do, it gave it a nice flow.

What about composers in the great tradition, people that you look back to, who were the grand practitioners of movie music?

Well, I'm a big Mancini fan myself. I mean, *Touch Of Evil*'s got it, you cannot improve on something like that. And I'm talking about Mancini the jazz composer because he took bebop and fixed it so you could stand it. [Laughs] And he hit a goldmine. Bebop's very expressive and humanistic and a lot of emotion, but people were alienated from it because they thought it's angry black music, militant, funny hats, goatee beards. I've never seen such a great music so despised. But of Mancini came along very elegant, and he took the building blocks of bebop and turned it into this tremendous series of movie scores. I don't love *The Pink Panther* or anything but that's great stuff. And so is *Moon River*, as far as that goes. That's really a masterful hand there. People later on begin to think it's corny, it's not hip, but he's very hip to me. Mamcone too, of course who can't like that? And all those guys in Italy who must have been having fun with their little organs and their twangy guitars — there's Duane Eddy in there if you listen. Surf guitar played by an Italian.

A lot of rock people are completely obsessed with Mamcone, of course.

But you can't improve on him either. He had a World Music kind of vibe, and funny percussion, very eclectic, and obviously having a good time. George Delerue is beautiful, these guys had their time and their context and it was good.

Who do you like who's working now?

I don't pay much attention. I don't go to see a lot of pictures and I'm not going to sit here and try to think of the names but somebody scored *Brazil*?

Michael Kamen?

Movie scared me so bad I never got over it, but the music was great.

Earlier, you mentioned that you've made music under various directions given by directors. When a director asks you to make a sound like Ford or point you toward a certain singer, does that annoy you?

Oh no. I learn to ask, what do you hear? Do you hear anything? Please tell me. *Wenders showed me Paris, Texas* when they had no music in it. It was very gripping, very moving. So I asked him any idea? Because I don't want to start and guess wrong. If the director has envisioned and imagined this thing and had gotten this far with it, because generally these things are done by the time they go for music, I'd

better find out what that is. And if they don't know, I get spooked because unless I know exactly, or I'm so certain. Then you have to have the confidence to believe in that. I might like something, the director might not like it. Or I might have been hired to do this picture against the director's wishes. Went in there, had a great time, director came in and hated it, was disgusted by what we'd done, took one little look and walked out. That shook me up. That was Hal Needham. A Bert Reynolds movie.

You recently recorded an album with Ali Farka Touré. When you play with other musicians now, outside of the context of film, do you see music in a more visual sense, given your relationship with the cinema?

I think that's true. When I was a kid if I got visually orientated towards something I liked it better. I used to listen to flamenco when I was four or five years old, without knowing where it was from. I used to see this terrain and the way the trees and the light looked and used to think, "Man, that music's coming from some place I've never been. That must be kind of wild." Blues, anything exotic. Ali Farka comes from Timbuktu, so who knows what that's like? I have no idea. But to get into the environment of the music, that's what makes things like that work. It's not a linear experience, like take your soul out type thing.

When you score your films does the time in which it's set help or hinder your music making?

To know a film is taking place 100 years ago is very liberating because then you can let your imagination go like they used to do in Spaghetti Westerns. You can have a fine time. I might have more of a problem with contemporary stories because of the language, the words, the sound of the people's voices, what they do. Some of Walter's films have a historical subject; I have turned down films if they are meant to be totally contemporary.

Are there any films you look back on and wish you had done?

I don't think so. I can see there's films I wish I'd scored but I wasn't asked, of course. I like [John Huston's] *Wise Blood*. It was eloquent, I loved it and I was really sorry I didn't get to work with Huston, above all. It would never have happened but you have to entertain some little fantasies. But the ones I turned down, I think I was right. I tend to be cautious. I don't want anyone getting into trouble, least of all me. □

This interview, part of The Guardian Interview series, took place at the National Film Theatre in June during the BFI's Celluloid Jukebox season. It is printed here courtesy of The Guardian and BFI Music By Ry Cooder is out now on WEA.

Ry Cooder



charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

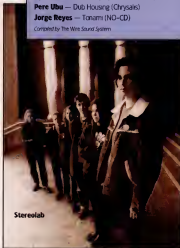


Fushitsusha's Keiji Hano

The Office Ambience

- Terje Rypdal** — Terje Rypdal (1971) (ECM reissue)
- Fushitsusha** — The Caution Appears (Disques De Soleil Et L'Acer)
- Stereolab** — Refined Ecstasies (Duophonic)
- Freeform** — Basic Speakers (Warm Interface)
- Various** — Soul Of Black Peru (Luaka Bop)
- Markus Stockhausen** — Possible Worlds (CMP)
- Steve Coleman & Five Elements** — Def Trance Music (Modalities Of Rhythm) (BMG)
- Spacebow** — Big Waves (Networks)
- Neil Young** — Mirrorball (WEA)
- Jimmi Tenor** — Europa (PUU)
- Ellery Eskelin** — Jazz Trash (Songlines)
- Redouan Ascent** — Music For Particles (Rising High)
- Ry Cooder** — Music By Ry Cooder (Rhino)
- Pere Ubu** — Dub Housing (Chrysalis)
- Jorge Reyes** — Tonams (NO-CD)

Compiled by The Wire Sound System



Stereolab

These Records 15

- Harry Belafonte** — Untold (PSF)
- Michel Chion** — Glona (Metamunk)
- The Hafler Trio** — All Done With Mirrors from *How To Reform Mankind* (Touch)
- Morton Feldman** — For Buntia Marcus (London/HALL)
- Sun Ra & His Myth Science Arkestra** — Cosmic Tones For Mental Therapy (Evidence)
- Intersystems** — Free Psychedelic Poster Inside (Streamline)
- Esquivel** — Music From A Sparkling Planet (Bar/None)
- Roland Kayn** — Tektra (Colosseum)
- Miles Davis** — Get Up With It (Lure reissue)
- Main** — Corona EP (Beggars Banquet)
- Aphex Twin** — Selected Ambient Works Volume Two (Warp)
- Cupol** — Klubba Kupol (4AD)
- Organum** — Rerunscute from Submission (Complacency)

- Ennio Morricone** — Duck, You Sucker (Alhambra)
- This Heat** — 24 Track Loop from *This Heat* (These)

Compiled by Howard and Andrew, These Records, 347 Wandsworth Road, London SW8



Terje Rypdal

Lo Recordings 15

- Low Reed** — Metal Machine Music (RCA)
- Endemic Void** — Subether EP (Language)
- Tortoise** — Whitewater (Soul Static Sound)
- DJ Food** — Nu Blud Two (MLO ma) (Ninja Tune)
- White Noise** — The Vibration Island
- Labradford** — Sedr 77 (Kranky)
- MLO** — Spike (Reflective)
- Flying Saucer Attack** — To The Shore (Domino)
- Psyche Vs Boymerang** — X=X (Lo Recordings)
- Two Player** — Extreme Possibilities (Wagon Christ ma) (Ninja Tune)
- Various** — Invisible Soundtracks Volume One (Leaf)
- Barbed** — Charlie K (These)
- Slack Dog** — Slack Dog EP (Lo Recordings)
- LJ Bukem** — Rainfall (SSR/Freemove)
- Bishop** — The Cateleptic EP (Emissions Static)

Compiled by Jon Tye, MLO/Lo Recordings

sound check

August's choicest CDs and albums — reviewed, revered, reviled

August winners:

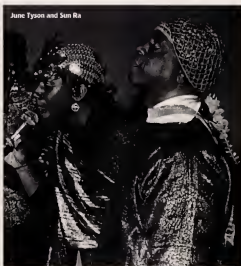
Astro-jazz physicists,
Penguin Cafe Orchestra,
Keiji Haino and Fushitsusha

In soundcheck:

Natacha Atlas, Django
Bates, Bedouin Ascent,
Anthony Braxton, John
Cage, Chemical Brothers,
Steve Coleman, Gavin
Friday, Herbie Hancock, Jon
Hassell, Kramer, Arto
Lindsay, Olivier Messiaen,
Arvo Pärt, Spring Heel Jack,
Sufi, Sun Ra, Nana
Vasconcelos, Steve
Williamson, Neil Young and
more...

In brief:

Catching up with the latest
releases at the outer limits
of jazz and noise



June Tyson and Sun Ra

WINNER

Afronauts in space

Various Artists
Universal Sounds Of America
Soul Jazz Records SJR 27 CD

Hailed by the US media as an evolutionary step for mankind, the 1969 moon landing provoked quite different responses in black music. For Gil Scott-Heron (as it was for the Situationists) on the ultra-sardonic "Whisky On The Moon", outer space had become another American territory, the Vietnam War extended into the stars. Conversely, the images of a Whole Earth/One World based on spaceship photography triggered both early 70s eco-optimism and War's pessimistic "The World Is A Ghetto".

If War's and Scott-Heron's music were just two examples of a black American

anti-sublime, then Sun Ra's perspective, in contrast, was less reactive than anticipatory and radically optimistic. On the 1972 studio version of "Space Is The Place", the centerpiece of *Universal Sounds Of America*, Soul Jazz's latest and excellent astro-jazz compilation, June Tyson sings The Arkestra into infinity: "There's no limit to the things you can do/There's no limit to the things you can be/Your thought is free." *Universal Sounds* traces the effects of this freedom through a Sun Ra-inspired network of labels, producers and album tracks from the 70s.

Modelled on the independent status of Ra's Saturn's label as well as the self-sufficiency of The Arkestra and Ra's pre-emptive entry into the synthesizer race, *Universal Sounds* reveals a previously hidden and esoteric side of Afro-futurism, the secret shadow of George Clinton, Earth, Wind And Fire and The Blackbyrds on one hand and a parallel

version of the post-Miles/Hancock/Pharoah/Henderson/Maugin axis on the other. Steve Reid And The Legendary Master Brotherhood's "Lion Of Judeh" pitches sheets of choopy electric organ funk against squalling brass and heavy rock bass. More urgent still is Byron Morris's classic "Kitty Bey". The opening, panic-stricken crossfire of piano arpeggios, hissing hi-hats and military brass plays like a version of Moriconi's *Battle Of Algiers* remixed for dancefloor Afroauts circa 1974. Like "Kitty Bey", The Art Ensemble's "Theme De Yo Yo" rejoins the breakout of astro-jazz with the switched on pulse of 70s funk. Conversely, David Durrah's "Space I" and "Space II", from 1975, are fragments from Moog synthesizer strings that tumble and spiral through an echoing astro-black space. Pharoah Sanders' "Astral Traveling" suspends catastrophic time in Lonnie Liston Smith's chiming rainforest of electronic textures. Marcus Belgrave's "Space Odyssey" opens with Mini-Moog comets crash-landing and breaking up, swooshes into astro-jazz, then drops out for the cosmic synth swirls to return. Ra is America's King Tubby and Belgrave, connected to The Arkestra through his Tribe label, was well on it, pushing jazz further out into sonic fiction back in 1974. On this album, the instructions for the resequencing of the electronic future circa 1995 are encrypted in their 70s solid states. Listen in and prepare to phase-shift.

KOOWO ESHUN

WINNER

Polished furniture music

**Penguin Cafe
Orchestra
Concert Program**
ZOPP 0002 2CD

When Simon Jeffes made his first Penguin Cafe Orchestra record in the mid-1970s, he seemed to pick up on

soundcheck

several aspects of creative music that were in the air at the time — the plain-speaking melodies of the English experimentalists, Sato's "furniture music," the twinkling electric pianos of jazz fusion, the eccentric, multi-instrumentalist adventures of contemporary folk music, a relaxed ethnomusicological tourism, the undeveloped repetitive figures of American minimalism, a dash of (the then-fashionable) ragtime, and the tape experiments of the electroacoustic pioneers. There was a modest Arts & Crafts tone to the project which happily ignored the bombastic prevalence of electric guitars, drums and screeching vocals that dominated the commercial music of that decade.

21 years later, Jeffes and his genial troupe of like-minded musicians are doing much the same thing (minus electric pianos) with a body of work that is immediately identifiable — a great achievement for any kind of composer. What was once creative music has become solid repertoire.

Concert Program is a re-recording, in a quasi-live situation at the Wool Hall studios near Bath, of 20 works from the PCO's back catalogue, including pieces such as "Music For A Found Harmonium" (the music used in the launch ads for *The Independent* in 1986), "Telephone Rubber Band" and "Giles Faraby's Dream" in which the 16th century work is accompanied by the chords and rhythms of "La Bamba." This breaks with PCO convention by featuring a raucous trombone solo by Annie Whitehead, but most pieces are close to the spirit of the studio originals.

So will PCO devotees fork out more money to hear pieces they already know by heart? And should new listeners start here or go back to the old albums on EG, now swallowed up by Virgin/EHP? Well, yes and no. Though thoroughly acoustic, I suspect the authentic medium for the PCO is tape and the lonely studio, where Jeffes can adjust the separate tables of his imaginary tea-room performers. In a real room the pieces are jollier but they still work, they're ingenious enough to engage the attention and they make great background (I guess the word "Ambient" is now out of bounds) music.

And this album, like the others, will carry on selling steadily for decades, a comfortable well-designed chair of a double CD. Jeffes makes furniture music.

Further consumer info: labels not named in this column should be available at good specialist retailers or, increasingly, in high street Megastores like HMV, Tower and Virgin. In emergencies, contact likely distributors such as These, RPM, Impetus, Recommended, Vital, etc. . .

All Saints: through Vital

Arc: PO Box 111, East Grinstead, West Sussex HR19 2YF

Artalent: 15 Passage De La Main D'Or, 75011 Paris, France

Avant: through Harmonia Mundi

Axiom: through Island

Blast First: through RPM/DISC

BvHaast: through Cadillac

Chap: 320-2 Jiyugaoka, Hoft City, Yamaguchi 747, Japan

Complacency: PO Box 1452, Palatine, IL 60078, USA



of which Sato, maybe even William Morris, would have been proud
JOHN L. WALTERS

WINNER

The black and crazy blues

Keiji Haino
A Challenge To Fate

LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER SA 54029 CO

Keiji Haino
Beginning And End, Interwoven

STREAMLINE 1002 CD

Fushitsusha
The Caution Appears

LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER SA 54039 CO

In portraits and performance, Keiji Haino strikes a deceptively fragile figure: what with his slight build and his almost feminine features, framed by long straight hair and squared off fringe and the dark glasses he's never pictured without, as if they're permanently fixed there to hide some deep secret, Haino is defiantly not quite like anyone else. In keeping with his spindly, skeletal presence, his preferred lighting is penumbral and, like his music, he's apt to burst the blackness with a spasmodic frenzy of falling arms and guitar or percussion, like a vampire seeking to escape the first glints of dawn's early light.

The precision of his self-presentation makes it worth dwelling on for a moment, for there are few other clues as to where this extraordinary creature is coming from. It's not his Japanese-ness that sets him apart, as it's difficult to pinpoint any other Japanese artist quite like him — unless you slip back to another time: the early 20th century Taisho era, perhaps, upon which French symbolist decay usefully went to work to undo the strict traditions governing Japanese art at the time. Something of that process echoes through Haino's titles and words (in translation). But more than any words, it's the way he sings them and, above all, plays guitar, that sets his admirers wondering if Haino followed Robert Johnson into a pact with a devil. His music — bizarre antique percussion, vocal music pitched otherworldly high, deep nose or haunched blues guitar for solo or two performance — are as

moving as only the most profoundly affecting blues, and like no British performer since Ian Curtis and Joy Division, or, elsewhere, Berlin's Enslavende Neubauten, Haino's music makes no bones about addressing the soul so intimately. But where to begin addressing his body of work that already stretches back some 20 years? No easy task when you're confronted with hour long single-track discs and 150 minute long double live sets. For *A Challenge To Fate*, his first purpose-built European solo release (on a French label named, aptly enough, after Mishima's *Sun And Steel*), he's come as close as he'll ever get to producing a Haino showcase.

Strictly speaking, *Beginning And End, Interwoven*, on the German Streamline label, was Haino's first European release, in 1993/94, but is only now readily available here. Despite some fine moments, this set of song improvisations recorded in Aachen by the estimable sound manipulator Christoph Heermann isn't really a good port of entry. Not only does it take some time for Haino's spirit to kick in, but when it finally does the music sits uncomfortably like a stolen flesh inside a crystal soundfield that inadvertently contains and displays it rather than allows it to come to life.

No such sound problems dog *A Challenge To Fate*. The disc is entirely suffused with the darkest-hour atmospheres that characterise Haino's PSF releases. Opening with a skull-scraping soul rattle of a shriek called "First Blackness", he metamorphoses through various manifestations of blues as worked through the wars of his restless, tormented spirit. If the track's (shortish) lengths make them easier to collect, this is far from being a collection of easily digested, bite-size Haino pieces. On the contrary, they're a sequence of distilled Haino essences, each one infused with a particular aspect of his being. Yet the deep-nose guitar tracks, impacted from great fissuring blocks of reverb and feedback resonating against the depthless blacknesses his music conjures, are scant preparation for the magma produced with his trio Fushitsusha. Word has it that the sessions for *The Caution Appears* stalked lines of such raging intensity that Haino neglected to sing. And indeed it's difficult to know how even his voice could survive the heat here.

Misnamed, *The Caution Appears* is a

magnificent pulviser of a disc which atomizes the soul of music and reconfigures it anew over and over. The great and terrible thing about this Hanoï music is, once heard, it's well nigh impossible to settle for anything less intense. Long may it burn for ever

BIBA KOPF

Abdelli

New Moon

REAL MUSIC BU 54 COMIC

Hossam Ramzy

Source Of Fire

ARC MUSIC BU 1035 CO

The Sunday Tea

Ensemble

Echo Of A City

SLASH SLA 011 CO

Senem Diyici Quartet

Divan

ARTALENT ART 951 CD

Four more examples of the new 90s Ecotica. Four decades ago Les Baxter and Martin Denny among their loopy travels at post-war America's suburban, polyester-clad leisure pioneers. In the present age of irony, the innocence of their kitsch approach is disarmingly charming and light-hearted. In Ecotica Mark II, the kitsch has been cannibalized by spontaneity and paint-by-numbers spirituality geared towards a more sophisticated consumer. Peter Gabriel's Real World label has virtually defined this peculiar combination of guilt, capital and New Age piety. New Moon, a merger of Berber, Latin American and Ukrainian music, is so unrelentingly pleasant it hurts. Everything is whisked away along the cooling current of the disc's anodyne surface. Abdelhamid Abdelli's slightly nasal voice floats reassuringly in the breeze created by Andean flutes, cuatros and daraboukas. It's the sound of a world that's been digitized and squeezed into a micro-chip.

Hossam Ramzy is an Egyptian percussionist who's been kicking around the UK since the 70s. He has worked with Essam Rachad (who has played out with both Trans-Global Underground and Natacha Atlas), Annie Sheppard and, most revealingly, with Robert Plant and Jimmy Page on their reunion album. No surprise then that Source Of Fire is

weighed down with the ponderous production values that characterise the World Music fusions aimed at the contemporary version of the Easy Listening market. Rubbing against the belyndaish kitsch of the sleeve notes, the synth-schlock production makes the oud passages sound like The Gipsy Kings.

If The Sunday Tea Ensemble's tag of "desert jazz" doesn't give the game away then a snippet of the lyrics surely will. "The ghettoes got the defecator teams/The Mothers had the best regime/The Princess was a virgin bride/My Rols Royce Shadow gives the numero uno ride." When it's not breathtakingly naïf, Echo Of A City is beguiled with the remorseless earnestness that only an over-educated music student could produce: uncomfortable sex-as-spirituality metaphors sit next to David Sanborn-esque saxophones and layered 'ethnic' percussion.

More waxy, air-brushed hues crop up on The Senem Diyici Quartet's Divan. The unique tones of the kalimba (a large thumb piano), saz (a Turkish lute), ney (a Turkish flute) and tablas are all processed into the oblivion of digital sound. The melodies are pleasing enough but the only sense of timbre comes from the chilling whirr of an over-equipped studio.

PETER SHAPIRO

Alimu Aga

The Harp Of King David

LONG DISTANCE 142009 CD

Alimu Aga is one of Ethiopia's most respected and sophisticated contemporary baganna players and this recording resonates with the quiet authority and mastery of someone who has both absorbed a great tradition and is continuing to develop and exploit it for his own expressive ends. The baganna is an extraordinary instrument with an extraordinary history, a large, ungainly looking lyre stringed with oddity buzzing sheepskin, it was played by Haile Selassie and, because of its royal heritage, banned from Ethiopia's public life for almost 20 years. It was also played by King David some 3000 years before he is said to have used it as a cure for insomnia. And the baganna's dark, contemplative tones do seem uniquely suited for the small hours.

If this is a healing or trance music it is of a very different order from the

delirious urgency of Pakistani qawwali or Moroccan gnawa music, creating an uneasy, meditative calm more comparable with Turkish Sufi flute music or even Morton Feldman's compositions. The texts, somewhere between prayer, poetry, lecture and song (imaginatively translated by Aga in the sleeve notes), are delivered with uncanny relaxation but in an almost menacing whisper.

Aga's whole performance takes place within a remarkably narrow musical and dynamic space. Both voice and strings seem pitched an octave below anything you would expect, while the almost vocal vibrations of the baganna create a strangely affecting, hushed ambience in which Aga's intimate recitation takes on great expressiveness and a genuinely mysterious power.

RICHARD SCOTT

Natacha Atlas

Dispora

NATION/MANTRA NATCO 47 COMIC

Natacha Atlas is a terrific singer, combining the explicit discipline and ornamental precision of a trained Arabic vocalist with a rare liberty and unrestrained sensuality that are harder to define than given her

Jewish/Arabic/Belgian/English background, it's better not to try! Dispora, nominally a solo album, features her in a number of different settings which combine Trans-Global Underground (who also produce) with oud master Essam Rashad and an Arabic orchestra.

"Dub Yali" has Arabic instruments droning and noodling in and out of a relentless, dark, dub-style bass and drum mix in a genuinely beguiling manner. Atlas sounds cool, focused and majestic in this context, everything is relevant to everything else, though as the mix progresses the vocals do get swamped, a recurrent problem. "Dispora Remix" is pure duet, crafted with a broad nod towards King Tubey. Here Atlas is clipped and echoed, her voice reduced to pure, clean sound in a manner that, ironically, seems to represent and honour it far more than the original "song" mix. "Iskendara (Atlas Zamelek)" takes seriously the possibility of a real rhythmic link, or at least compatibility, between Middle Eastern music and Hip-hop and leaves us with something more than the sum of its parts.

"Feres", by contrast, features an Arabic

string section, darabouka and bendir drums, harmonium and grand piano. At the risk of sounding like an ancient fundamentalist, this line-up offers some of the most genuinely rhythmic moments here, the instrumentation being used in an inherently vocal manner which interacts with Atlas's vocal and really allows her to sing as well as she can.

But this is not always the case and the problem of finding an appropriate context for Atlas's voice, a voice which really speaks back at her and gives her something to resonate against, is often sidestepped. Though her voice is clearly the most interesting and flexible instrument here she often sounds isolated, suspended in an Ambient club maze, as if she recorded the vocals separately and the rhythm tracks were grafted on as an afterthought. Too often there is no real organic link between the two — just a conjunction in which Atlas is reduced to a mere detail amid fairly conventional bass and drum tracks which are mixed at dubland volume throughout. At its best, Dispora does transcend the global Ambient trance-dance supermarket trap, however, at other points it falls slap back into it and Atlas gets buried in the confusion.

RICHARD SCOTT

Axiom Funk

Funknomicom

AXIOM 314 527 597 CDPMC

This is Bill Laswell's homage to Funkadelic and to the late Funkadelic guitarist Eddie Hazel, a project three years in the making that both anthologizes and updates the original George Clinton blueprint and its multiple offshoots, taking in an extended cast of funk VIPs — Bootsy Collins, Bernie Worrell, Garry Shider and Clinton himself, to name a few. Funknomicom revisits prime Funkadelic territory but acknowledges its past and future too: there's room for improvisational funk-ed-up jazz and Junglist beats amid the heavyweight reunion.

Eddie Hazel features on "Pray My Soul", his last recorded session (from 1992), an extended display of soloing echoing both the original "Maggot Brain" and Hendrix's "Little Wing". Hendrix is an important presence here, his influence acknowledged throughout. Hazel's playing and in Bootsy's deeply spaced-out rendition of "If I Was 9"

soundcheck

Funfunfoncomon serves to reiterate the place of Hendrix in black music in much the same way as Charles Shaar Murray, author of *Crosscut Traffic*, has done in print. There's also room for a cameo from another famous 'crosscut' artist, Sly Stone, on the vaguely surreal soul anthem "Tell The World", contributing keyboards and 'vocal adlibs'. The solemn recitation of an unpublished Hendrix poem, "Trumpets And Violins, Violins", was not a good idea, though. Rock 'poetry' tends to come off badly when shorn of its musical accompaniment and Hendrix, for all his guitar playing genius, is no exception.

Perhaps inevitably over its double album length, Funfunfoncomon tends to sag in parts, particularly the meandering instrumental "Animal Behaviour" and the somewhat obvious James Brown pastiche of "Sawmachine" (in spite of Maceo Parker's performance). However, its best bits are very good indeed, peaking with the tremendous "Hedious Mutant Freaks", which manages to mystify everything special about Funkadelic into one celebratory, seven minute track.

There's a nod to more contemporary mores with "Jungle Free-Bass" and the opening "Order Within The Universe", though these mesh neatly into the sound of the project, as does the remixed older material (some of it dating back to the early 80s). It certainly rescues and revitalises a music that has been sampled to near-death in recent years, and gives it enough of a contemporary makeover to allow it to dodge any 'brand new retro' label.

TOP MUGS

Derek Bailey
Drop Me Off At 96th
SCATTER Q2 CD

Lol Coxhill & Pat Thomas
One Night In Glasgow
SCATTER Q3 CD

A very smart new outlet from Scotland, Scatter's first few releases place them in the front ranks of today's improvised music labels. Debuting with Carve Another Motch by a strong Japanese ensemble called Delocato, they've followed up with these excellent albums by lone guitarist Derek Bailey and the devilish twosome of Coxhill and Thomas



CHIP: through SAM/Vital

Cooltempo: through Chrysalis

Damned Ship Works: PO Box 712, Elm Grove, WI 53122-C710, USA

Delmark: through Topic, Cargo

Disques Du Soleil Et De L'Acier: through Harmonia Mundi

DIW: through Harmonia Mundi

Dorado: through RTM/DISC

Douglas: through New Note

Drop Me Off At 96th is drawn in equal parts from recordings Bailey made in London in 1986 and a radio broadcast in Bern, Switzerland a year later. As always, he finds a zillion and one ways to articulate a tone, combining fretted notes with gruff bass chords, doped or slashing clusters, unusual shapes and slowly moving figures. With a sideways sweep of his pick Bailey can change direction instantly, extending into endless permutations of note patterns, inverting or re-ordering pitch sequences with astounding ease. The gentle opening of "Listening To JR" is perspicuity in action, while "Bunn Fight" integrates an open-stringed timbre plucked from behind the bridge before a surprise jazz outburst intrudes manically on the scene. The more rooky sounding radio recordings include an advert for the guitarist's own Incus label. Bailey uses a Martin flat-top guitar here, without any room behind the bridge this forces him to look for additional alternative playing techniques — listen to the way he brushes the strings with fingernails on "Part Of Time, Part 3", producing brittle scrapes and bright harmonics.

Where Coxhill and Thomas's first record, *Holm (Naxos)*, placed their improvisations within the frame of dance music, on much of *One Night In Glasgow* they reverse the tactic, recontextualizing bits of throbbing House in wonderful saxophone and piano freestyle. "Glasgow Before Dark" puts them over an Afro-Cuban jazz track, while "Shake Well" finds the saxophonist matching Casio lines on top of Thomas's cassette-player interjections and burbling beat. Coxhill begins telling stories, as he's wont to do on "Lucky's Dream" he holds a mock conversation while Thomas plays on. Come the hysterical, sustained grade-B sci-fi effects of "Where is Johnny?" Coxhill's off in some insane zone. His soprano is as supple and beautiful as ever, he twists it into amazing shapes to fit into Thomas's shifting game plan. And the piano playing here is evidence enough that Thomas needs to be much more frequently recorded.

JOHN COBBETT

Django Bates
Winter Truce (And Homes Blaze)
JMT 514 023 CD

In the 80s, Django Bates's big band Loose Tubes was part of something

called the British Jazz Revival. It was some time after its demise (revival and band) before he got another recording contract. *Winter Truce* is his third release for the JMT label, continuing the seasonal themes of *Summer Fruits* (And Urvast) and the solo *Autumn Fire* (And Green Shoots). Like the first album, there's a mix of numbers for big band and quartet — Delightful Precipice and Human Chain respectively — but most are for the larger group.

The sound is totally distinctive, though that's a mixed blessing. Scoring is bright, but over-written in that it's dense and often fussy, with strong suggestions of Loose Tubes whimsy — zany keyboard interpolations, silly mused vocals and sound effects (thunderstorms and dogs barking, that kind of thing). The drums are much higher in the mix than with Loose Tubes.

Another ex-LT member, saxophonist Ian Ballamy, is featured throughout. Ballamy's own quartet, with the same personnel as Human Chain except for Steve Watts instead of Michael Bowie on bass, takes a different approach to the whimsical one on display here. On Ballamy's recent and superb *All Men Amen* (B&W), the Bates 'humour' was kept under wraps, the mood mellow and pastoral. That mellowness is found here only on "Kookaburra Laughed", a theme slightly reminiscent of Charlie Haden's "Silence", where Ballamy's strong and beautiful tone is heard more or less uninterrupted. He also solos cleverly with Django on the tricky "Golden Pear". But those big band tracks make *Winter Truce* a frustrating album. Django Bates is such a brilliant musician, yet his talent still seems unfocused and distracted.

ANDY HAMILTON

Bedouin Ascent
Music For Particles
RISING HIGH RH 37 CD/LP

At his best, Bedouin Ascent's Kingsuk Bwos succeeds in inverting the conventional hierarchy between rhythm and melody. When he refuses the normal opposition between percussive — backing and 'proper', structured music, *Music For Particles* gets mighty fascinating. Take, for example, "Trace 2", where a Techno-led breakbeat pattern is allowed to disrupt itself gorgeously while the simple synthline rises and falls as if it's been programmed to act as a

replacement for the rhythm's usual function of marking time. Bedouin Ascent's rhythmic sensibilities owe less to the norms of Tranced-up Techno than to the left-field spirits of improvisation and deconstruction.

Every intelligent Techno exponent has had to wrestle with the dilemma of where to take the music once its run-of-the-mill linearity has been negated. *Musik For Particles* may be Bissas's first up-to-date release (previous recordings such as the 1994 *Science Art 6 Ritual* album were made up of unreleased, older material), yet it reveals him still struggling to resolve the aesthetic tensions within his music.

"Close" starts with a cyborg drum solo of frenetic precision and alien time-signature, where firecrackers pop and the snare sounds as if it's pummeling aluminum, but its two melody lines rapidly run into an idyllic arpeggiation, the beats disappear and the listener is left with a choice between Philip Glass and Mike Oldfield as companions. While the track tries — "Swarm", "Clusters", "Waveform" — describe brilliantly the complex fabric of rhythmic threads that make up most of the tracks, they could equally appeal to Bissas's preference for clear-toned mellowness. Occasionally, the two strands come together without annihilating each other. "Crash On Broken Glass" overlays its glacial throb of cowbell and primer-patter snare with a variation on New Romantic synthpop that eventually speeds up into a well-paced and phrased take on electronic thrash.

JAKUBOWSKI

**Tim Berne's
Bloodcount
Lowlife — The Paris Concert**
JMT 514 019 CD

**Tim Berne's
Bloodcount
Poisoned Minds — The Paris
Concert**
JMT 514 020 CD

It's tempting to imagine that Ornette Coleman's music might have developed into something like this if he had not disbanded his original acoustic quartet.

Also (and occasionally bantane) saxophonist Tim Berne shares Ornette's soft but keening tone, extravagant intervallic leaps and linear melodic logic

but takes them even further into avant garde territory with a polyphony that is free to build, explode and fragment according to its own strange impulse. The *Bloodcount* line-up features Chris Speed on tenor saxophone and granite-hard clarinet, rumbling but incisive bassist Michael Formanek, dynamic drummer Jim Black and unorthodox, noisy electronic guitarist Marc Ducret.

These Paris live recordings come from September last year and show just what an emotionally tense but focused and advanced group this can be when allowed to stretch out. With just five long, uninterrupted performances across both CDs, the music relies on a constant ebb and flow, with musicians occasionally taking the lead but the emphasis firmly on collective improvisation.

Lowlife is dominated by the 40 minutes of "Prelude: The Brown Dog Meets The Spaceman", opening with a restrained, melancholy theme with echoes of Eric Dolphy's later work. The group is in no hurry, building gradually from a lengthy, scurrying bass solo into a complicated angular tune that leaves Berne suspended in mid-phase to continue the fractured momentum. A long drum solo effectively changes the mood, making way for a ghostly conversation between clarinet, alto saxophone and bowed bass.

Poisoned Minds opens tentatively with "The Other", the strained and dissonant horns playing a duet of increasing tension over ostinato bass and bustling percussion. The group seem to reach a pinnacle of articulation here, relying on the music's own power to keep up the imaginative momentum for a totally compelling half hour. The four-part medley concluding the CD includes "Speed", a stringing off with an incisive contribution by Chris Speed (living up to his name) on tenor, and the attractive, low key "JB's Stove". This is music with all the humanity and commitment that makes improvisation work. These CDs represent a selection of almost two and half hours of music recorded over four days of live performances — enjoyable if exhausting listening.

LINTON CHISWICK

**Anouar Brahmeh
Khomsa**
ECM 1561 CD

It's a testament to Manfred Eicher's often sneered-at production skills that he

manages to fit all 76 minutes of this album on one CD with such flawless elegance. Moreover, it's a collection whose quirky charm recalls ECM in its exploratory heyday. Brahmeh is an old player, but the smoky resonance and impressionistic tone-colouring of his playing is a far cry from the desert-storm bluster of, say, Rahbi Abou-Khalil. Here it's showcased (perhaps a little too sparingly at times) in solos, duets and ensembles with a blue-chip group of Western European sidemen (Couturier, Danielsson, Christensen, Galliano) and the album's (considerable) strength resides in the juxtapositions of those musicians. Most inhabit the same Euro-improv territory, but it's fascinating to hear a free jam like "Souffle Un Vent Du Sabie" pointing up happy collusions of style. Brahmeh's McLaughlin-esque lyricism is upstaged by Danielsson's opulent bass lines, with Galliano's raw energy, restless passion for experiment and fast-fingered chromatic accordion runs complemented by Couturier's sparse and simple piano comments.

The filmic roots of much of the music show greily through at times (the accordion and piano duet of the cheerily nostalgic "Clapnet Les Voies", for example) and the album sags in the middle under the weight of aimless doodles which lack the sense of space and concentration which distinguishes the interplay on the better tracks. But that's what the CD split button's for, isn't it?

Best of all, there's a blessed absence of earnest Middle East ethnicity. By abandoning any pretence to Orientalist homology, Brahmeh's music manages to create its own homeland within itself. And very nice the scenery is, too. Not a masterpiece, but getting there.

PAUL STUMP

**Anthony Braxton
Knitting Factory (Piano/Quartet)
1994 Volume One**
LEC CD LR 222/223 2CD

That Anthony Braxton should record more jazz standards isn't really surprising, but on piano? Sure, he's written for piano before and spoken of the importance of the piano music of Schoenberg. Stockhausen and Fats Waller to his own early development, yet this is a standards set, so the focus is on interpretative rather than compositional matters. Perhaps in flight from virtuosity, maybe

enjoying the practical challenges involved, the end result is a baffling and rewarding addition to his ever-expanding catalogue.

From the moment Lemie Tristano's "Wow" kicks off, it's clear that weird things are going down in the nory department. The group — a quartet featuring Marty Ehrlich on saxes and clarinet, Joe Fonda on bass and Pheeroan AkLaff on drums — play it fairly straight, which only serves to emphasise the quirkiness of Braxton's approach. Ehrlich is outstanding on reeds, particularly on Dave Brubeck's winsome "In Your Own Sweet Way" (which Braxton recorded with Brubeck himself 20 years ago).

As with all Braxton's work, dimension and space are central, and he figures out remarkable ways of enlarging and transforming these tunes. He doesn't comp in the traditional sense, preferring to sketch out a series of tantalising backdrops that bring a new dynamic potential to the compositions. He tends to observe the changes and often works through quite narrow sets of variations, but he utilises a highly personal grammar: the chords he chooses and the rhythms he lights upon are way off the beaten track, even by 'our' piano standards. It has some of the cramped, glancing insight of Sun Ra's playing and none of the percussive attack of Cecil Taylor-school experimenters. And needless to say, it's worth a raftload of albums by teenage jazzbores with technique!

WILL MONTGOMERY

**John Cage/Giacinto
Scelsi/Arvo Part
Annun Per Annun — Organ
Works**
NEW ALBION NA 074 CD

**Olivier Messiaen
Méditations Sur Le Mystère De
La Sainte Trinité**
ECM NEW SERIES 1494 CD

In the endless debate among hi-fi obsessives about sound reproduction and the simulation of a digitally captured space in your living room, organ recordings have always been something of a benchmark. If you believe that a set of domestic speakers can approximate the air movement generated by a 32 foot pipe within a stone cavern, then you

soundcheck

and your money probably deserve to be parted. I can think of no other instrument which is listened to from within its own resonating chamber. This creates real difficulties for the translation of organ works to playback environments: the physics of vibration fundamental to the site is lost. Of course, much music suffers from the brutal transposition from rave or rainforest to kitchen or headphones, but somehow the whole architecture of an organ's sound seems partially flattened by recording and playback.

Having said that, *Annum Per Annum* contains some sublime compositions finely recorded and performed (by Christoph Maria Moosmann) which I can only hope to hear in situ one day. Scelsi's *In Nomine Lucis* is remarkable for its subtle manipulations of the instrument by several precisely-instructed assistants. This gives rise to minute shifts in pitch and timbre and an almost electronic quality to the tonal structures. The only comparable work I know is Keith Jarrett's hugely underrated 1976 *Hymns Sphæres*, which explored the instrument in some extraordinary ways. The Cage piece, *Souvenir*, is curious, oscillating between meandering passages and petulant outbursts, endearing or irritating, depending on your mood. The six pieces by Arvo Part — his complete organ works — which make up the bulk of this release are really beautiful, not as translucent as his writing for strings or voice but remarkably direct and clear, while retaining his unfailing ability to evoke the metaphysical without descending into the kitsch, emotive narratives of Tavener and Gorecki. The opening piece, *Annum Per Annum*, makes use of the organ's lungs by allowing a wave of chords to expire into silence, pipe by pipe, as the motor is turned off and the air slowly runs out. The urge to explore must be strong with an instrument you physically occupy.

Before Messiaen wrote the massive *Livre Du Sacrement*, which runs over two hours, he composed the equally formidable organ work *Méditations Sur Le Mystère De La Sainte Trinité* (1969). The nine meditations are concerned with the liturgical tradition and display his intensely concentrated explorations of harmony and symbolic structures. Messiaen's writing for organ is dense and self-referential. The



Echo Beach: through Cargo

ECM: through New Note

ENJA: through New Note

Eskaton: through World Serpent

Extreme: through SAM/Vital

For 4 Ears: Steinechtweg 16, CH-4452, Itingen, Switzerland

Globestyle: through Ace/Pinnacle

God Factory: through Plastic Head

Nat Hut: through Harmonia Mundi

meditations are completely absorbing and — at over 73 minutes — pretty demanding listening. Unfortunately, although the sleeve provides the composer's own notes on the work in the original French as well as English, the apparently thorough contextualizing essay by Uwe Schiewert appears only in German. Strangely, the only other recording of this work I can locate runs well under the time of this one and adds percussion, chorus and ondes martenot. Mysterieux indeed.

PAUL SCHÜTZ

The Chemical Brothers Exit Planet Dust

JUNIOR BOYS OWN JBO 3 CD/MLP

Jammin' Unit Discovers Chemical Dub

RISE HIGH RSN 36 CD/LP

Like The Beastie Boys, The Chemical Brothers apply the logic of rock to dance music. As their erstwhile *nom de guerre*, The Dust Brothers, indicated, The Brothers inject some dirt and grit into a musical genre whose surfaces are too often antiseptic in their slickness. Their sound is characterised by the static and rumble of analogue equipment smudging manic HipHop beats. More crucially, they use rock's dynamics as a way to move a crowd that has been desensitised by the relentless forward motion of too many dub DJs.

Stealing kicks from MC5's "Rocket Reducer No 62" and The Doors' "Peace Frog" and using such tried and tested stadium rock tricks as false endings and singalong chants, the first two thirds of *Exit Planet Dust* makes for a great party album. The Chemical Brothers are a one joke act, though, and it wears thin pretty quickly. When they try to expand their parameters they fall flat. I keep hearing echoes of Gordon Lightfoot's "Sundown" in the low key collaboration with vocalist Beth Orton ("Alive Alone").

As part of Air Liquide, Jammin' Unit has been responsible for one of the more original takes on Trance Techno. Air Liquide use HiHop rhythms and Acidic momentum to texture the generic soft-focus that blurs much Electronica. The unappealingly bad title of this album, however, Jammin' Unit Discovers Chemical Dub, is an unfortunate indication of the quality of his solo

output. The album's relation to dub is comprised of a bit of echo, a dash of melodic and a Dennis Alcapone sample. The rest of *Chemical Dub* is sub-Aphex Twin knob-twiddling, reversed samples ("Serious Drop Out" consists solely of a backwards vocal) and stupid FX. At least with Steve Howe or Yngwie Malmsteen you could laugh at how over-the-top their excesses with technology were.

PETER SHAPRO

Steve Coleman And Five Elements Def Trance Beat (Modalities Of Rhythm)

EPIC 01241 63181 CD

Despite all the technical and intellectual blarney that surrounds the M-Base movement, its spokesman and theoriser Steve Coleman may yet be looked back on as the most gifted and original alto saxophonist of recent times. At his very best with Dave Holland, Coleman's own music sometimes seems to be digging itself into a deeper and deeper rut. But while the death of M-Base has been fought for half a decade now, Coleman manages repeatedly to fine-tune the format, developing the slurring, crypto-P-Funk and HiHop of *The Strata* Institute into the complexities of the early Five Elements records, to the streamlined sounds of *Black Science* and now to this.

Def Trance Beat (Modalities Of Rhythm), whatever that means, features a stripped down group, with Reggie Washington's electric bass and Gene Lake's drums providing the complex rhythms and Andy Milne improvising sparse acoustic piano accompaniments, rather than the usual arranged riffing. There is no guitar, but there is the occasional appearance by tenor saxophonists Raw Collamore and Craig Handy, and a four-piece percussion section turns up on two of the ten tracks. Significant modifications to the Five Elements sound include hints of World Music in "Flint" and "The Khu (Divine Will)". The former opens with Latin percussion, built ingeniously into a busy, fusion-funk beat by Washington and Lake, and then periodically re-emerging with Milne's occasional salsa piano reference. The saxophone melody is a simple, minor key line, a little reminiscent of John Lewis's "Django". "The Khu

(Divine Will)" uses the percussion section to produce a vaguely African sound, again given a funk transformation by the bass and drums. Elsewhere, chord changes and orthodox song forms play an unexpected role, with Coleman donning his baseball cap to Charlie Parker (whose work has always seemed to have a ghostly presence in Coleman's space-age style) on a reworking of Dizzy Gillespie's "Salt Peanuts", and a strange bebop cut-up which mixes Parker's "Confirmation" with drummer Lake's "Pedagogy" to form "Ventilable Pedagogy." The core quartet plays superbly throughout, with Coleman once again displaying the consistent inspiration that separates the great from the good.

LINTON CHESWICK

Michel Doneda Ogooue-Ogoway

TRANSES EUROPEENES TE003 CD

In a recent issue of *Rubberneck*, the improvising duo of American double-reed player Joseph Celli and Korean komungo (zither) player Jin Hi Kim drew attention to one of the main problems associated with cross-cultural collaborations within improvised music. Kim, who has evolved a unique vocabulary on the komungo beyond her early training in traditional Korean folk and court music, described the duo's performances with a Korean folk drum ensemble as unsatisfying because of the ensemble's insistence on working within traditional rhythmic patterns. Celli added that "they were the least flexible of any group that we've worked with. All of the adjustments had to happen on our part."

Something similar appears to be happening in the collaboration between European improvisers Michel Doneda and Paul Rogers, and Deba Sangu and the Gabonese percussion ensemble Les Bateurs De L'Empire. This collaboration began in April 1993 when Doneda and Sangu visited Gabon in West Africa, later arranging for the ensemble to perform with them in France, where this festival recording was made. Doneda is one of the most original and exciting (yet still understated) improvisers to emerge from France in recent decades. His elegant, penetrating soprano saxophone is influenced more by global folk musics than free jazz ancestry, however, neither he nor virtuoso UK double bassist Rogers could loosen the Gabonese

percussionists' hold on their traditional predilection for intense, rhythmic pattern-making. Although the five improvisations contain moments of excitement, especially when Doneda's soprano suddenly explodes into multiphonic frenzy from the midst of a forest of incantatory chants, drums and shakers, sometimes you wish the percussionists would relax the tempo, strip away the dense layers, allow some light and space to reshape the scheme of things. But the Gabonese musicians are governed by pulse, too bound up in their own traditional structures to create a new language with free agents like Doneda and Rogers, for whom improvisation knows no limits.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

The Electric Chamber Pieces In A Modern Style

N-GRAM 10722 CD/CLP

John Carne Rhythmicum

MUTE STUPID 140 CD

In the postmodern, post-sampling world, sound — musical, environmental or otherwise — has become trace material, to be manipulated to an artist's own ends. Processing has become a lead instrument. Working under the guise of The Electric Chamber, William Orbit has chosen to "process" seven pieces by 20th century composers. His choice of composers is impeccable, if a little mainstream — Barber, Sane, Pärt, Ravel and Gorecki — and the meditative, elegiac qualities of the pieces will certainly appeal to fans of Ambient music. Beyond that, you have to ask the question: why bother?

Orbit's skill in recreating each piece using the latest technology cannot be questioned but he adds little of note, beyond the spiraling textures that have become the trademark of his Strange Cargo releases. On the two occasions that he attempts something a little more ambitious, the results are somewhat incongruous. Re-interpreting Pärt's *Canons* as a shuffling funk number only detracts from the spiritual purity of the work, while the rhythmic version of Ravel's *Pavane* veers a little too close to Easy Listening for comfort. I would have liked to see Orbit tackle a more challenging group of composers. Ligeti, for example, or Messiaen.



soundcheck

The original Rhythmicon was a machine co-designed by American composer Henry Dixon Cowell and Leon Theremin in order to realise one of Cowell's theories: to adopt a harmonic approach to rhythmic organisation by reducing intervallic and rhythmic relationships to mathematical ratios. *Rhythmicon*, a collaboration between guitarist John Came and Nick Cope of the electronic group Pinin, seeks to invert the logic of Cowell's theory by drawing harmonic and melodic information from rhythmic data and vice versa. Came generates the rhythmic material by playing his compositions arhythmically into a simulacrum of the machine. This data in turn generates the harmonic information and the two separate strands are overlaid and entered into a music-notating/playing computer. The album features recordings made using this method.

The music is a considerably easier to digest than the theory behind it. On certain tracks ("Root" and "Mosaic"), the arpeggio-driven rush is highly reminiscent of Philip Glass's *Glassworks*, but on the whole, the air of naive simplicity of much of the material brings to mind that early 80s phenomenon Techno-pop, pioneered by such artists as The Silicon Teens.

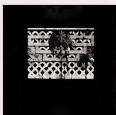
This lack of complexity is actually a strength not a weakness. The very simplicity of each piece engenders a direct emotional response, albeit on a superficial level. On such pieces as "Yellow" and "Link Tank", however, where Came moves outside these self-constructed boundaries, it's difficult to distinguish between these and any number of Ambient transmissions Ironically, by attempting something more complex, Came produces something less interesting. I wonder what Cowell would have made of it?

PETER MCINTYRE

Gavin Friday Shag Tobacco

ISLAND CD 8036 CD/MC

Once he stopped being a (Virgin) Prune, Gavin Friday began a stop-start career as a contemporary song-and-dance man and began a new kind of Euro-glam sash that was equal parts Bowie, Brian and Weir. What with the sadly prolonged silence of the defunct Band Of Holy Joy's writer/vocalist Johnny Brown, there's currently nobody else so committed to



Hemisphere: through EMI

Interra: through Pinnacle Import

JMT: through PolyGram

**Junior Boy's Own: through
RTPL/DISC**

Kickin': through SRD

Knitting Factory: through Cargo

**Leo: through Impetus, Cargo,
These**

**Long Distance: Natari, 22
Playbridge Square, Goring-By-Sea,
Sussex BN12**

exploiting this kind of over-ripe pulp zone which is fertilised by the decaying flesh of a European rock ballad style that in Britain died with Alex Harvey (Marc Almond's honourable secondary career as Bret balladeer aside).

There's no niper padgers for ragpicker songwriters than here, and it's a wonder Friday's presently left alone to pick out the gaudiest rags for himself. Indeed, he's spoilt for choice, and his new album all but surfs on references — veiled and direct — to Judy Garland, Lotte Lenya and almost any other overworked cabaret icon you can think of. But Friday's never been nervous about patchworking songs from his enthusiasms. He discerns and then explores the pathos in threadbare images and legends, and redeems them through his juxtapositions of comball beauty and ugliness. His method is exemplified both by the innuendos of the album's title and the sample of Caruso he deploys against lines about dirty bathwater going down a plughole in a song called, appropriately enough, "Caruso". Just as almost every song title smacks of self-dramatising creative bankruptcy ("Kitchen Sink Drama", "My 20th Century", "The Last Song I'll Ever Sing"), the songs they mis-label are mostly imaginatively arranged and disarmingly affecting, exactly because of the way Friday resorts to tired, wended words and invests them with the heartbreak of the end-of-the-performer on hearing that the resort's shutting down for good. As for his version of Bolan's "The Slider", he slips into the verses' onomatopoeic pay-off line like it was a piece of Rimbaud erotica.

Really, he shouldn't get away with this stuff, but he performs it with real vaudevilian gusto that is impossible to dislike. By the album's end, its bank and burlesque fall away to reveal the tell-tale bones of Gaff Friday's big heart.

BIBA KOPF

Herbie Hancock Dis Is Da Drum

MERCURY 528 185 CD/MC

While I was listening to this, a friend walked into my room and asked if it was the new Shakatak album. That says it all really: disorienting funk-like rhythms grounding unpercussive, anodyne keyboard fills, misplaced strings and sub-

Grover Washington Jr horn charts.

Making it worse are the occasional samples of generic African-ness, signalling the presence of some sort of grand conceptual notion about the links between the "rhythms of the street" and the drums of Africa. At least Shakatak would never have debased their music with such misplaced grandiloquence.

Herbie says in the accompanying press release, "there's music for people over 35 and beats for people under 35." This might have been true ten years ago because, with the exception of the G-Funk of "The Melody (On The Deuce By 44)", the beats are hopelessly behind the times — they would have sounded dated on LL Cool J's first record. The title track reprises that early 80s Prophet V keyboard sound from "Rocket", which makes you realise the brilliance of that track had nothing to do with Hancock and everything to do with Material.

Despite all of their faults, Steve Coleman's M-Base projects at least feel like the musicians involved either love HipHop or have the impression that HipHop signals a radical change in their creative process. On *Dis Is Da Drum* the feeling is unmistakably that HipHop signals a radical change in the marketplace. Shakatak wouldn't have been ashamed about admitting that.

PETER SHAPIRO

Jon Hassell Sulla Strada

MATERIAU SONDRI MISO 90066 CD

In which Jon Hassell contributes the music to Italian dance/theatre group Magazzini's apparently spectacular 1982 stage adaptation of Kurosawa's *On The Road*, and is joined by regular collaborators Michael Brook and Nana Vasconcelos and sundry narrators from Magazzini.

Face it, it's all been said about Hassell before, but perhaps this, at least, is worth restating: Jon Hassell's ideas and techniques have so thoroughly permeated lo- and hi-brow contemporary electronic music, albeit often in a third or fourth hand way (a kind of modern oral tradition, which is appropriate somehow), that it's difficult to think what contemporary music would sound like without his influence. I repeat: there's categorically no doubt that Hassell has had an important effect on contemporary music, as Miles Davis or

Jim Hendrix or James Brown or The Velvet Underground.

He remains, of course, almost completely unknown to the greater public.

This reissue will do little to redress that balance but it's a welcome addition to any fan's collection. Hassell's body of studio work is such a unified project that projects outside of that canon — this, or the live *Surgeon* album, or his work with Farfalia — help shed light on his motivations and methods. The ongoing narrative thrust of this piece — only heard on CD of course, but unmistakable — highlights the sense of journeying at the heart of all Hassell's music, a journeying towards magical transcendence and erotic awakenings. **SIMON HOPKINS**

Indicate

Whelm
TOUCH TO 25 CD

Jim O'Rourke's uncanny ability to enter into a collaborative venture and maximize the potential of that situation is now abundantly evident. His work with artists as disparate as Eddie Prevost, KK Null, and Gunter Hübner provides ample confirmation of his flexibility and musical ingenuity. On this release, O'Rourke finds an able collaborator in Main's Robert Hampson. Given that there were reportedly heated arguments between the duo over the conceptual approach to this work, it is remarkable how the input of the two coheres with such force. This friction acts as an animating, invigorating catalyst within these recordings.

The three untitled tracks (designated simply according to their duration) are subtly and superbly crafted, and although much of this music occurs at the periphery of one's hearing, it eschews soporific and pacifying properties in favour of the quietly abrasive. Bursts of static give way to extremely low volume radio broadcasts, fragments of near-silence are displaced by haunting, drone-based interludes presumably generated by guitar treatments and samples fed through O'Rourke's array of home-built effects units. This results in an agreeable level of grittiness permeating the music, a welcome relief from the digital slickness pursued by many contemporary musicians.

Naturally, any artists who are working to extend the scope of what is possible in contemporary music making deserve to be commended. And while there are precedents for what O'Rourke and Hampson are doing, it is edifying to be reminded that sound sources which would be anathema to the likes of digital fetishists such as FSOL can engender a work as fresh, vital and absorbing as *Whelm*. This is not to decry digital technology per se, as it has demonstrably been utilised to great effect by a number of artists, but merely to point out that other options are still available.

JOHN EVERALL

Mikami Kan
Jazz And Other Things
PSF PSFD-60 CD

The Japanese blues singer Mikami Kan was introduced to Wire readers through the back door of Edwin Pouncey's review of *Tsugaru by Vasara* (The Wire 137), the trio he shares with Keiji Haino. That disc's title refers to the wily northern reaches of Japan's main island, an area perhaps best known, if at all, through *Travels Of A Purple Trump*, an ambiguously written wartime celebration of his homeland by the infamously despised novelist Osamu Dazai, the author of *No Longer Human*, who killed himself in 1948.

As Alan Cummings's deliciously overwrought sleazebait to this release might clear, there's some useful mileage to be made comparing Japan's rural north to the Delta that birthed the blues. Better still, simply listen to Mikami Kan sing and you immediately get a picture of weather-blighted rural communities, the irreversible population drifts towards industrialised cities and the yearning for an irrecoverable past. His songs are coarse crosstret interviews of guitar and grainy voice. They're as witfully threebeats as Butch Hancock's Texan cowboy ballads, so much so you can feel the cold wind blowing through them. These sortwags make themselves felt beyond language, and when words fail, Kan comes down all the harder on the guitar, making it speak the simple eloquent tongues of traditional folk music at the moment it wakes up to the electric noise of the city. It's a point of no return and resigning oneself to it, happily or otherwise, is the source of this particular blues.

BIBA KOPF

Kramer
The Secret Of Comedy
SHIMMY DISC SHIMMY 075 CD

Dogbowl And Kramer
A Hot Day In Waco
SHIMMY DISC SHIMMY 073 CD

Hugh Hopper And Kramer
A Remark Hugh Made
SHIMMY DISC SHIMMY 076 CD

Carney/Hild/Kramer
Black Power
SHIMMY DISC SHIMMY 077 CD

Kramer has been going through some troubled times of late. He's had a four and a half million dollar lawsuit slapped on him by actress Ann Magnuson — ex-partner and collaborator in *Bongwater*. His Shimmy Disc label, longtime home to a number of creative misfits in the US underground, seemed in jeopardy. But in the great US legal tradition he's retaliated with a nine million dollar countersuit. The TV rights will doubtless soon be up for grabs.

Back to the music. In light of all this turmoil, it's fitting that *The Secret Of Comedy* is a harrowing record, taking the finely honed neo-psychedelia of last year's *Egomaniacs* project into more sinister territory. Apparently, Kramer, usually a producer/catalyst or collaborator, felt he couldn't write lyrics until his business and personal life became "completely fucked up" and here he makes sure he shares his muse with us.

Stuporous backings of mellotron and flutes, for example, soon sour in the context but the music has an introspective power — in the same league, though ultimately not as vital as John Cale's *Muse For A New Society* and Nick Drake's *Pink Moon*.

A *Remark* Hugh Made finds Kramer teaming up with ex-SO3 Machine-head Hugh Hopper and, for one typically dolorous track, the reclusive Robert Wyatt. Kramer runs his eerie psychedelic soundscapes around the melodic pivot of Hopper's bass — "found" voices and wild slide guitar wigs-outs are bizarrely mixed in with some recordings of the late Gary Windo's barking, howling sax lines out of context now but astonishing nonetheless.

On *A Hot Day In Waco* Kramer takes a

back seat to singer/guitarist Dogbowl in a set of endearingly creaky songs with a cover of "Tracks Of My Tears". On the brazenly tasteless title track, romance blooms while the Branch Davidians' complex goes up in flames. Fun, but pretty inconsequential.

Last and most definitely least is *Black Power*, where Kramer's often wayward sense of quality control comes even more into question. Sax player Carney's most famous spell has been with Tom Waits and his playing is impressive, but Daved Hild most certainly ain't. Credited with 'words and voices', he sounds like someone who has wandered into the studio and won't go away, heckoning, rambling and 'singing' in excruciatingly flat tones.

MIKE BARNES

Land

Land
EXTREME XCD 032 CD

The last time I heard Land's guitarist Dennis Rea he was playing one of the great phased guitar solos of all time on Earthstar's 1979 *Euro-Electronica* classic *French Skyline*. Land, his collaboration with earthly Ambient guru Jeff Grieve, promises much — on paper and on disc — but in the end the marriage never quite reaches a satisfactory consummation.

Ironically, it isn't for the exotic and loud quadsilver improv, which the above pining promises, that this album scores. It's for a brass-knuckle reversion of Fourth World rhythmic shibboleths upon which found sounds are cleverly flourished, a new, if less distinctive take on the computers' I' carmines, lasers-in-the-jungle postmodernism of the redoubtable Mo Boina. To this end, Land's greatest asset is trumpeter Lesli Dabaia, whose skittering, muted and processed sounds add rawness to the music — the use of reverb raises delicious questions as to whether or not Miles Davis might have taken a direction similar to Land had the digital funk virus not paralysed him post-Agharta.

The record opens dimly with the Kosmet-katch and sampled darabouka plod of "Caravan", but track two, "Bustle", is a hugely invigorating, noisy knees-up of rhythms and riffs scampering around, colliding and piling up on each other like maddened insects. The chaotic hurly-



Fuzzy Logic:
gray or green numbers

Not a trip, but a journey into an environment presided over by Cage, hooked up to an electric generator (W303)



Toga of the Revolution:
beyond the horizon

A "brilliant" approach to the classical electronic sound. Energy and warmth are broken into heart, resulting in the conquest of the soul by the new world revolutionaries. (W303)

coming soon



Distributed by Pinnacle Imports

bury of "Ku" is an uproarious lucky bag of "World Music" clichés — shakers, chanting, drums cut and spliced to perfection. It's offset by the contrasting, less-is-more approach of Grenke's synths and Rea's guitar over a hushed octave chorus in "Shu".

It's fair to say that Land do break a few barriers on the obstacle course of East-meets-West/North-meets-South fusion. But the faint coffee table sheen on their soundscapes suggests that they're not perhaps the biggest of barriers. Not this time, anyway. One to soundtrack the Kenyan holiday slides.

PAUL STUMP

Arto Lindsay Trio Aggregates 1-26

KNITTING FACTORY WORKS KFW 164 CD

Arto Lindsay's status as a guitarist, as opposed to someone who uses a guitar for his own idiosyncratic purposes, has often been in some doubt. As someone who has himself stated he can't "play" guitar as such, he's variously been attacked, acclaimed or written off as that questionable thing, a "primitive." Put it this way: the sleeve of this CD features an African pencil-and-balpoint illustration of two elephants flanking. It's the sort of thing that invariably gets labelled as "primitive" art — in other words, the artist is, presumably, not conventionally trained or may not have access to more elaborate techniques. But what the hell, it's still two elephants flanking. And so it is for this CD.

Some 15 years after his debut in DNA as a mainstay of New York No Wave, Lindsay remains the paradigm of Downtown Man, proudly flying the flag for inspired diletantism. Others of his generation come and go, become international installation artists or star in Jim Jarmusch movies. Lindsay never gets famous — although he did have a cameo in *Desperately Seeking Susan* — but he does carry on doing the unexpected. He's got a profitable sideline producing artists from Brazil, where he grew up: last year's *Mansa Monte* record *Abse And Choro* was a prime example of his skill at mixing an AOR chariteuse sound with touches of alert angularity. His own nose-funk-pop group with keyboardist Peter Scherer, *The Ambitious Lovers*, made none of the commercial inroads they promised to, so now it's back to the drawing board, or



rather the Knitting Factory.

An initial, cursory slam through this wilfully departed record (26 tracks, ranging from 26 seconds to 3:47) suggested that it would be a too-sketchy, and quite possibly unlistenable, appropriation of Naked City's game — flash-try provocateur racket. But it proves to be far more coherent than that, and more seductive. In this trio with bassist Melvin Gibbs and drummer Dougie Bonnie, the unifying factors are Lindsay's tortured scrawlings up the fretboard and his even more off-beam vocals — from his patented thin-man yelp to what sounds, on the opening "Be Great", like the world's worst Tommy Cooper impersonation. The songs hang together on lyrics, or rather scraps of lyrics, in Lindsay's usual manner of the literate, distracted Dadaist.

What's so compelling about *Aggregates* is the viscosity of the sound — with Lindsay's guitar skittering over the insinuating number of drums and bass. You can point to one or two conventional reference points — a couple of tracks do seem tenuously related to *The Ambitious Lovers'* nerve-rending funk (Lindsay's scuffed wail-wh on "Looks Like You"), and there's some pesky Heideggerian thrash, but with a militant snub to sophistication (notably "Flag Of Friendship", demonstrating guitar as the art of guerrilla campanology). It's a record that tests anyone's capacity to love it, and I doubt anyone could possibly like all of it. It misses *The Lovers'* tensions between Lindsay's wild-card factor and Scherer's soul boy smoothings. But plenty of long term fans will be only too happy to see Lindsay back at his old forte — horrific noise at its most urbane.

JONATHAN ROHMEY

Luaka Bop: through WEA

Material Sonori: through New Note, Cargo

Multimood: through SAP/Vital, Plastic Head

Music & Arts: through Harmonia Mundi

Mute: through RTM/DISC

Nation/Mantra: through RTM/DISC

New Albion: through Harmonia Mundi

Federico Mompou Música Callada

ECH 445 699 CD

"La Música Callada", La Soledad Sonora! — Quiet Music. Sonorous Silence. The words are from the Spanish mystic St John Of The Cross, chosen by Federico Mompou to express a kind of music that is the voice of silence itself. The Catalan composer was born in Barcelona in 1893 (he died there only in 1987) and wrote exclusively for piano, and for solo voice with piano accompaniment. Mompou's reclusive nature meant he

couldn't sustain a concert career and his character is reflected in the music. To force a comparison, this is minimalism with religious inspiration again, but dealing in miniatures. But just as Mompo's little pieces fail to develop internally, so over his career his music remained remarkably unchanged — many decades before it became fashionable, the composer made this ethos his own.

Musca Colliada's 28 short pieces were written between 1959 and 1967. The pieces have little in the way of resolution, except through repetition of the opening section. Mompo's music is usually described as having an exquisite melancholy, but that's not quite right. The tone here is reflective but studiously neutral, even if the effect is haunting. The roots of his piano style are in Debussy and Satie, who attracted him during his time in Paris, but comparisons are partial. Mompo's stiffness is the stillness of eternity, he is a fine craftsman in sound, less banal and less of an ingenue than Satie. But his art is more circumscribed than Debussy's, the titles here just refer to tempo, the pieces much less eventful than the French composer's piano works. The sound of bells is one evident inspiration — as with *Arvo Part*.

Though the composer himself made some recordings, and there was an album by the pianist Alicia De Larrocha, Mompo's music has remained largely a well-kept secret. Pianist Herbert Henck first came across it in 1991 and expresses great insight on this recording, capturing perfectly the 'sonority of silence'. Though the music fits perfectly with the ECM ethos, how it works is a beautiful mystery. There is nothing else quite like it.

ANDY HAMILTON

Ferus Mustafaov King Ferus

GLOBESTYLE ORGO 089 CD

"Macedonian Wedding Soul Cooking", says the caption on Ferus Mustafaov's CD sleeve: I had a wedding once — I remember it as an embarrassingly low key business involving pots of tea and virtually no guests. I realise now the way to get married is to hire a Balkan wedding band, and the phone number of Ferus's agent is thoughtfully included in the CD booklet.

This is a ferocious album of raging

tunes and clattering 11/B rhythms from a virtuosic, hardworking 'Macedonian octet'. Just across the border is Ivo Papasov's Bulgarian wedding band featuring a similar high octave mix of Balkan flamboyance with jazzy clarinet and accordion. But Ferus Mustafaov's sound has a rhythmic fire that recalls high-speed Latin American dance music, like the maddening merengues of accordionist Francisco Ulloa.

Particularly striking is the cooek, a Balkan belly dance: the opening melody leads to a hypnotic groove over which the saxophone wails, the drums ring out and it's easy to imagine the whole restaurant rising to its feet. Ferus's clarinet sound is warm but his saxophone has an aching edge. He is supported by a pair of accordionists who squeeze out rapid-fire duets with frenetic precision. The production has a good live quality which doesn't smooth over the sharp edges but is still warmly listenable and works well at high volume.

This is another release in Globestyle's reliable 'Accordions That Shook The World' series, and Ferus has been well served — excellent sleeve notes by Kim Burton put the music in context and the photos show King Ferus himself looking no-nonsense in a snakeskin suit. The best reason for getting married I've heard is in a long time.

CLIVE BELL

Peter Pannke Morgen

WIRGO SPT 1087 CD

It is intriguing to hear Morgen so soon after Abad Azmi's wonderful *Suerte* (reviewed in *The Wire* 134). While the latter made clear the close connection between the Spanish and the Arabic soul through the legacy of the Hispanic Moorish poets, Morgen unveils the works of another obscure medieval figure in an attempt to uncover lost connections between East and West.

In this case the poet is one Heinrich Von Morungen, a 13th century Minnesinger who left his native Germany for India in search of new sources of inspiration. While his texts are preserved, the music Morungen sang them to is forever lost, which has prompted Berlin-based composer and singer Peter Pannke into imagining new settings in collaboration with Middle Eastern and Asian musicians. The results are deeply

moving. Sung in their original Old German, the texts, like many before and since, use the notion of impossible love as a metaphor for a fruitless mystic quest. 'If I had made only half as much effort for God [as I did for her], he would have accepted me long ago,' sings Pannke.

Subtitled 'Songs From A Visionary Musical', Morungen claims to be a 'work in progress'. Yet this looseness of structure is entirely welcome in a collection that is more effective as an evocation than as a dramatisation of past events. As for the perspectives opened by Pannke's music, they are nothing short of a revelation. Although the instrumentation and performing style are completely Oriental, listeners familiar with medieval European music will not feel out of place. The compatibility of the fluid, rhythmically supple style of the troubadours and of equally ancient traditions beyond the Caucasus is here made to sound strikingly obvious. The prospect of a medieval world now less divided between what we now think of as Christendom and Islam is a provocative proposition, and as such could well trigger further experiments, further questionings of the boundaries of 'Western' and 'Eastern' music. All this shouldn't eclipse the fact that, beyond its role as an indicator of untapped possibilities, Morungen is a deeply moving work in its own right.

SYLVESTRE BALAZARD

Spring Heel Jack There Are Strings

ROUGH TRADE R353 CDLP

Much of the recent output of drum 'n' bass shows an exploit alignment with the mechanical warmth of Detroit Techno. Alex Reece, War Doctor, 4 Hero and A Guy Called Gerald have all imitated the plush melodicism of a Carl Craig synth wash as a way of both confounding media expectations and claiming an ancestry apart from white grooves and Vapo-Rub. Spring Heel Jack, on the other hand, seem to echo Motor City mavericks Drexciya by contaminating the smooth, digital pots of sound with bass-heavy rhythms, clanging percussion samples and off-kilter melodies.

Although they eschew ragga-flavoured Jungle, Spring Heel Jack make clear connections with the studio processes of both analogue dub and the computer-

rooted contemporary dancehall style. Shards of the jittery, angular 'pepper seed' rhythm crop up here and there alongside seemingly arbitrary tastes of drop-out to create a rhythmic foundation that is expressly Jamaican in outlook and origin.

Just as the growing gun chatter of the MC gives a human presence to the sick beats of ragga, Spring Heel Jack's often metallic samples rust Jungle's pristine surfaces. The snippets of keening strings and ringing bells are usually left in real time — an unerring sensation for ears accustomed to timestretching. The harp whispers and cinematic strings on "Colonnades" and "There Are Strings" lend the second half of the disc a mournful, solemn quality which is directed towards the end by the appearance of "Lee Perry Part 1". This track sounds like an attempt to make an unabashed Jungle beach anthem a jaunty surf guitar sample riding the wave of the hard breaks creates the forward motion while a female chorus of "ba-ba ba-ba ba-ba ba" sets the hook.

The shameless pop sensibility of "Lee Perry" makes it exciting, a sensation unfortunately missing from most of the record. It feels fairly original, but it lacks the bass or dizziness of the best drum 'n' bass.

PETER SHAPIRO

Kate St John Indescribable Night

ALL SAINTS ASCOZS CD

After years of work as a member of The Rawling Beauties and Dream Academy, and as a session musician with the likes of Van Morrison and Julian Cope, one would expect Kate St John's debut album to be a poised affair. And so it is. A collection of delicately orchestrated songs, *Indescribable Night* negotiates the distance that separates a bygone age of Edwardian songs and modern textures, linking up with a smoky charmon style en route.

This is a lengthy distance to cover and St John's approach is, in general, to eschew the grand gesture in favour of more subtle, intimate moments: woodwind, piano and vibes are the album's main instruments. The title song is an accomplished, unashamedly romantic work. St John's lilting vocals are a focal point, although she frequently avoids such a role, giving leads

soundcheck

elsewhere to Brian Kennedy, George Fame and Virginia Astley.

The defining atmosphere is, nevertheless, one with which The Rawshins Bezouzes first experimented with lyrics adapted from Terryson, "There Is Sweet Music Here That Softer Falls" is sweet and rather breathy, leisurely, the kind of song one might find in a Peter Greenaway remake of a Merchant-Ivory country house film. Yet at the point at which the song threatens a development of a somewhat cloying demeanour, St. John turns it around by introducing jarring textures. But there is no preoccupation with texture to the detriment of other elements. St. John shows an adept management of all elements of song composition.

LOUISE GRAY

Sufi

Life's Rising
VIRGIN AMBT 9 CD

For this first Sufi album, Rudy Tambala, of AR Kane and MIA/R/A's fame, has teamed up with his sister Maggy and sometime Cocleau Twins drummer Benny DiMissa to produce an interesting strain of Ambient and soul-derived music. There are plenty of tinkering, fragile acoustic guitars and Maggy's breathy, sensual vocal contrasts with the dub-heavy bass sounds that underpin much of the record. There are also instrumental passages, the sometimes graceful "Chrysalis", the more slight "From Slow Syrup Silence Rise Time Tilted Glances" and the minimalist "Soon". These are generally less engaging than the tracks featuring vocals, tending to lapse into a mix of disembodied chimes and drones.

Life's Rising begins to sound special with tracks such as "Rising Into The Blue", which utilises heavy, heavy bass and an assortment of squiggly noises, and "Lostaday", which is like "The Girl From Ipanema" in dub. "Beloved" comes on like the most self-effacing of Topknot croons, and "Desert Flower" is both languid and smooth flowing.

There's a half-cocked threat of politeness hanging over *Life's Rising* which, oddly enough, gives it a slight edge, despite its Ambient leanings. On "Love", for instance, there's the ghost of glossy super-cold soul in Maggy's delivery, but because of the



instrumentation the song is never allowed to descend into torpor. The music manages to build up and resolve this conflict and much of the album's fascination derives from this resolution. Certainly in the light of the mainstream success of Massive Attack and Portishead, there should be room for Sufi's particular take on Ambient soul.

TOPIC RIDGE

Sun Ra And The Arkestra

Sound Of Joy

DELMARK DD 414 CD

Sun Ra And His Cosmo Discipline Arkestra

A Night In East Berlin/My Brothers The Wind & Sun, No 9

LEO LR 149 CD

The usual line on Ra runs something like this: fine pianist and bandleader strongly influenced by Fletcher Henderson, formed own group in SDOs after years *being* a pro, got seriously strange for high-on-20 years, rediscovered the big band mainstream, made fans, lost fans, carried on working pretty much until he died.

These two releases, more or less bookends to this line of events, show at once the huge leaps made by Ra over these 30 years and the unique consistency of his musical and mystical obsessions.

Given Ra's mythologized Egyptian ancestry, it's cute that he's become the subject of considerable archaeology. *Sound Of Joy*, recorded at the end of 1957, would have been released as *Jazz By Sun Ra Volume Two*, the successor to *Sun Song*, so respect to Delmark for adding to the huge body of Ra-work that Evidence has already put out, by making available this complete session, along with previously unreleased tracks.

Now again, the standard reading of Ra from this period is that this is fairly straight ahead smaller big band fare, only vaguely hinting at the weirdness of some of its titles ("Planet Earth", "Ankh", "Saturn") and so on. But even such an early Arkestra (which already included lifelong Arkestrates Pat Patrick and John Gilmore, as well as a young Julian Priester) can point to Ra's growing sense of exotism. Now that we're all busy reinventing 50s American

suburban kitsch, and claiming that we've really owned for years the Martin Denny and Les Baxter LPs we picked up for some extortionate price last week, it would be easy to read too much into Ra's flirting with cocktail bar jazz and South Sea island charm. But there's little doubt that crappy pop informed early Ra as much as big band jazz, and it certainly adds to the increasing sense of otherness in this set.

Fast-forward 30 years, Ra was still sucking in new sounds and fresh delights. *A Night In East Berlin* features The Cosmo Discipline Arkestra live in B6, presenting their vision of black American music as freak show. Sure, this band swings like hell but Ra never loses his naivety, nor his sense of fun, hear his mesmerizing, spidery synth solo wind its way round Ellington's "Prelude To A Kiss". Two years later, at the Knitting Factory, a bigger band demonstrated that the New Thing remained new and still mutable with "My Brothers", a 20 minute group improvisation: check the unusual — and welcome — appearances from growing Art, Jenkins and a funously scrapping Billy Bang. An essential purchase for this set alone.

SIMON HOPKINS

Various Artists

Ancient Lights And The Blackcore

SUB ROSA UTOPIAN DIARIES SR7B CD

Various Artists

Continuum Asorbus 2

SUB ROSA LYNOMIE SR8S CD

The darker side of Ambient contains some of the most interesting music being made at the moment. Musicians are responding to technology which enables them to probe around inside a sound and transform it in microscopic ways — we can all be watchmakers in our own homes. So while the music of the new technology has always had its extrovert edge — The Prodigy, for example — an area has developed in which ever darker, subtler, more interior sounds can be explored. A mumbly blues singer, or the slow movement of a late Beethoven string quartet, might capture the same mood.

The Belgian Sub Rosa label will take your hand and lead you up the grim garden path. *Ancient Lights And The Blackcore* is their third Utopian Diaries

H-Gram: through WEA

9 Winds: Kilzone Music, 3464
Rosewood Avenue, Los Angeles, CA
90066, USA

Noteworks: through SAM/Vital

PDCD: through Plastic Head

PSF: through Harmonia Mundi

PUC: 306 Kramville Road,
Olivebridge, New York, NY 12461,
USA

compilation. As a unity it doesn't really hang together, but think of it as a little magazine of sound and it works.

Scorn achieve a kind of gradual sunrise with frog-like sounds and tropical birds waking up, trembling curtains of sound descend, then suddenly a big beach-clearing machine of a rhythm chews everything up. Seeleed don't use a beat as such, but exploit the fact that a snuffing, flapping strip of sound will sound rhythmic if you loop it. At first I thought I was listening to the equipment rather than the music, but these three short tracks grew on me quickly.

David Toop's recordings of Indian shaman ceremonies in the Venezuelan rainforest are not music at all, but a riveting, if not horrifying, aural document. Against a background of chatting and gentle slapping noises, six male shamans put each other through a curing ritual — we hear spring, vomiting and eventually a sporadic chanting which tips over the edge into screaming. Eavesdropping on this kind of extreme experience is overwhelming: after hearing it, the next track, featuring Timothy Leary's mellow voice repeating "Why are you here?" and a dense wall of sound, seems a bit daff.

Talking of walls of sound, Phil Spector used to wear a badge saying "Back To Mono." Another Sub Rosa compilation, *Continuum Asotus 2*, sports the slogan "Back To The Pre-Monothist World Of Us." This collection divides neatly in two, on the one hand the world of the deep throbb, on the other a kind of in-ye-hera percussion.

The young Israeli drummer Tobias Hazan makes his drums sound like he crawled inside your head before setting them up. His first track builds up to a neo-trip work which I'm afraid is just too cheerful to qualify as Dark Ambient (as a sticker on the CD cover would have it). But his second offering, memorably titled "B-a-b-a-pi-de", attempts an impression of a toetus starting to talk inside the womb.

In fact there's a theme of 'inside-ness' about this album. Lilith (Chicago's Scott Gibbons) supplies a low throb — I mean gland-suddenly-low, as if you were inside an old colonial flat's heating boiler, long overdue for a visit from the maintenance engineer. This piece is enormously impressive and gets better as it rolls along, until after about 20 minutes you seem to be inside a jet

engine. Nail down your ornaments before turning up the volume. **CLIVE BELL**

Various Artists Balinese: Barong And Keris Dance

INTERRA IN 5703 CD

Various Artists Sundanes: Degung-Sabilunggan

INTERRA IN 5704 CD

After an explosion of ethnographic music releases during the 70s and the fizzy populism of BOs World Music, it might be fair to assume that our perception of unfamiliar global musics has grown more sophisticated, less generic, more differentiated. Fair maybe, accurate, not always. Terms such as *Traditional* and *Tribal* offer infamously 19th century guidelines to whatever new world order arose the post-race generation in the next millennium.

Even the music of a tiny island such as Bali is full of variety. One of the big questions to ask at this point in history concerns the endurance of that variety. The last big change in Balinese gamelan came with Gong Kebyar, the fast and flashy style that caused Colin McPhee to suffer misgivings back in the 30s. Now music is presented for tourists (very tastefully, it has to be said) but the presentation onwards, to an appreciative but largely ignorant and transient audience, rather than onwards, to a critical, involved community, must affect the music's potential for change. So can change only come in the commercial arena of regional/global pop or World Music fusions? Maybe.

Although I enjoy the music, reverberant and non-packaging packages of these Internas releases (no cover whatsoever and a bit of New Ageish guff on the back) I see them as a step backwards from the variety once available on vinyl. Jacques Brunet's lavishly presented, beautifully recorded discs of South East Asian music on Galloway, the German Archiv Produktion sets of Balinese and Javanese gamelan, or a double album such as the French CBS *Le Gamelan Balinois De Lomang*, which focused on one composer, thus emphasizing Indonesian music's inspired individuals and distinct signatures.

So once again, just like the recently reissued Brian Jones Presents The Pipes

Of Pan At Jogyakarta, the emphasis has turned away from orientation to disorientation, the album a tool of psychedelic functionalism, of psychic rather than cultural geography. But ultimately, all of these musics become fictions of one kind or another. Perhaps better pa-fun than academic fodder. If you don't object to Internas's blatant exoticism and conspicuous anonymity (note: all of the Javanese cassettes I own like to credit musicians) then both releases trundle away in the browser racks very nicely.

DAVID TOOP

Various Artists 3 Fingers And A Fumb

BLAST FIRST BFFP107 CD

Discoey, the London clubspace for improvisation started by the Blast First label, has always suffered slightly from a deficit of explanation and context. Unlike Blast First owner Paul Smith's previous nods towards the (loosely) avant garde, such as commissioning or licensing records by Glenn Branca and Sun Ra, both of whom fitted quite snugly alongside the label's mid-80s, Sonic Youth-dominated roster, Discoey has stabbed in so many directions at once as to warrant the use of the word 'eclectic'.

It's worth remembering the atmosphere in which Discoey first appeared more than a year ago: headline Charles Gayle was about to work with The Rollins Band, while Caspar Brodman, who later appeared alongside FH Kessel, had toured with his band Massaker alongside Helmut. Carving out an arena for improvisation to merge with the more forward-looking elements of rock (thus, subsequent Discoey appearances by The Blue Humans, Put Sat, Scoopheads and Moonshades/Skree, both at the club and on the double CD live document, cut-up alongside Key Haino and Jere Brodman) seemed one way for things to go in general, and at Discoey in particular.

Yet *3 Fingers And A Fumb*'s heinous play of eliminating track breaks on both CDs, while admirable for the way in which it forces the listener to confront each morsel in turn, has the possibly unintended effect of reminding you of all the bits that didn't work. John Oswald's professional lecture around the subject of his Plunderphonic snippets (though the moment when he asks "Any

questions?" after one burst of cut-up Zorn is worth the price of admission alone). Stewart Home in general, Aaron Williams's unclassifiable mélange of drum-banging and screeching, And while George Melly's snatch of Dadaist poetry is way too brief, its presence illustrates the confusions that lie at the heart of Discoey, that make it simultaneously compulsive and appealing. Simply put, it's no longer possible to create a new spirit of Dada or Situationism in 1990s mediocrity, and certainly not by appealing to those particular pests. Richard James's infamous Discoey DJ set, where sandpaper was substituted for records, unfortunately not present here, is a good case in point. James, and Discoey, would be hard pushed to find a less shockable audience than the one which gathers at the club each month, or to round up a group of people who, in the search for extremes and out-ness, would lap up the mix of literariness, faded Sa-Crit glories and improvisation with so little questioning (at its worst, Discoey is possibly the ultimate postmodern drinking club).

Discoey is still thriving, so in a sense the release of this live disc/chronicle from 1994's monthly events could seem as premature as it is fascinating. But *3 Fingers And A Fumb* does offer a worthwhile taster for what it can be like to revel in the club's aesthetic confusions.

JAKUBOWSKI

Various Artists Jazzmatazz Two

COOLTEMP CT 47 CD/MC/EP

Steve Williamson Journey To Thrust

VERVE 526 425 CD

Outside The Rough And The Smooth

CORADO DORO 43 CD/MC/EP

Part of a Sounds Of Blackness show involves a 60s review merrilee in which the vocalists dress up as James Brown, Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, et al. What at first seems tadly soon becomes serious when they point out that they're underlining African-American jazzness. Which seems to be what Jazzmatazz is about.

This project gets respect before it's listened to because of the names

soundcheck

involved: Donald Byrd, Reuben Wilson, Iku Kamoze, Chaka Khan, Freddie Hubbard and Bernard Purdie have all made great music, so working in tandem with new players like Gang Starr's Guru, Patra and McShel N'Degeocello shouldn't be capable of producing modern classics?

The original Jazzmatazz album was denoted as worthy but dull, scorned for not matching up to the hype of its line-up. This was to ignore some excellent tracks, but jazz and hip-hop is hip-hop, and while it may be mentally satisfying to point out the stylistic connections between the two they are products of different eras, light years apart. Hip-hop is reductionist while jazz is expansive. Compressed together they lose their personality and it's a tribute to the musicians involved on Jazzmatazz One and Two that they found occasional sparks of inspiration amid the murk of the collision.

With Jason Rebello already gutting music to become a Buddhist monk, it's a little unnerving to see Steve Williamson in semi-nude garb on the cover of *Journey To Truth*. Can the British jazz scene withstand another deflection to God?

After some fiddling around, this mostly great record comes up with the goods (although it never gets near to matching the sustained intensity, invention and creative improvisation of Williamson's marathon live performances).

Williamson, a brilliant and underrated player, understands hip-hop's need to distill jazz to minimalist loops and plays along. The title track, sung by Jhelisa Anderson, is much like her own excellent *Galactic Rush*. Both records are dark and anemic and suggest the best way to mix jazz with 90s ideas.

Like Jazzmatazz, *Outside* cram their ranks with names: Greg Osby (whose 3D lifestyles on Blue Note was one of the best and most neglected recent updates of jazz), the ubiquitous siren Jhelisa Anderson, Tony Remy and long time sidekicks Cleveland Watkiss and Byron Wallen take part. A sign of the times arrives in a Jungle track, and the album's incessant desire to fuse styles, from funk to jazz to folk marks Matt Cooper, *Outside's* instigator, as the Bob James of the 90s. *[Is that meant as a compliment or a criticism, Jake? — Ed]*

JAKE BARNES



Random Acoustics: through Impetus

Real World: through Virgin

Rec Rec: through Recommended, Cargo

Rising High: through RTM/DISC

Robot: PO Box 18252, 1001 2D Amsterdam, Netherlands

Rough Trade: through Pinnacle

Scatter: (1/2) 79 West End Park Street, Glasgow G3 6LJ

Shimmy Disc: through Cargo

Various Artists
King Size Dub Volume One
ECHO BEACH/COLLISION/EB 001 2CD

"If you're shure [sic] that you are clever," chuckles the sleeve of this double CD compilation, "don't hesitate to send us your best tracks for Volume Two." I'm not clever enough for that, but I can see the problems of contemporary dub on display here. These people are not only working in the shadow of old masterpieces like *Super Ape* or *Reaction In Dub* but also using very different technology. Classic dub was stripped down, whereas these tracks seem built up, composed on computers and heaved into hard disks.

This UK compilation is supervised in Hamburg by Nicola Beverungen, label manager for On-U Sound, and Adrian Sherwood's team hover around much of the album. In fact, the more Sherwood has to do with a track, the better it sounds. The opening "Walkabout" is a Sherwood production — a colossal sound, fitting the album title's emphasis on skin, and a wonderful live drum presence amid the parting space-weep machines. There's a Jet Harris-style guitar on "African Land" as well as a filthy live snare drum and a production busting with ideas. Ben Sherman's tracks are a kind of rock-dub, expensively polished by David Harrow's fine keyboards. Small Axe refer to classic dub with old cymbals and a gritty sax and trumpet sample on "Witch Doctor", a well sculpted piece and the track that I most want to hear again. And the best vocals come from the dolphins on Sherwood's "One Drop".

That's the good news. A lot of the other offerings boil down to standard crusty soundtracks. Dub bass line meets Techno beat, here's a House piano riff, there's an Acedee siren, let's use the worst snare drum ever, chuck it all in, oops, now it's a bit of a mess, so let's sample someone shouting "Here it comes", then, sorted.

Sometimes the keyboard brass and the electronic drums just sound too tiny and oppressive. Playbe the act of mixing the dub was more intuitive on an old studio desk than it can be inside a computer. For a fine exception, see Iration Steps from Leeds, who are not afraid to make a real racket. It's Techno, it's experimental and they overdrive their effects boxes until the casing blisters. **CLIVE BELL**

Various Artists
Miniatures
VOICEPRINT VP 159 CD

Morgan Fisher's unimpeachable 1981 celebration of omnium, and rescue of the year so far from the infamously prolific Voiceprint label — or indeed from anyone.

Any Various Artists product sporting 53 tracks in 42 minutes defeats rational analysis: where do you start, especially in such an El Dorado of eccentricity as this? With personal highlights, I guess. Fisher's cut-up collage of Perry's "Jerusalem" ("Green And Pleasant"), Robert Wyatt's ear-opening delay-systems interpretation of "Strangers In The Night", the splendid subway ambience of Merabolist's "Racing Poodles", Trevor Whart's endearingly elegant "Beach Double", Etron Fou Leloublan's maypole music for the end of time — the lot goes on.

This isn't on quite the same monumentally deranged scale as Fisher's neglected cover-version collection *Hybrid Kiki*, but it is on occasion just as barmily inspired. Not only is it a portrait of genuinely enjoyable and utterly off-the-wall music, it's also a fascinating document of an overlooked period of the UK's musical subculture, when, as Fisher explains in his copious sleeve notes, suburban post-punks like Mark Perry, free jazzers like Lol Coxhill, urbane deconstructionists like Hector Zazou and professional headcases like John Cheacy could co-exist and cross-fertilise.

True, there's a whiff of bearded, brown-nose, 70s London alternative culture (Ralph Steadman, RD Laing and the gang are all here), but there's no doubting Fisher's screwy sincerity — particularly valuable are the documents of genres-in-embryo, with kindergarten minimalism from Robert Fripp and Gavin Bryars, Jurassic-era Grunge from a young Half Japanese, and prototype systems utterances from Michael Nyman and Simon Jeffes. This baroque banquet is essential listening for all those remotely in sight of the outer limits of rock and pop. And it's funny, too.

PAUL STUPP

Various Artists
The Soul Of Black Peru
LUAKA BOP WE B33 CD

Peru and Chile have not been the hippest of global sources of late, what with

punchy orchestras playing "El Condor Pasa" across Europe and giving out a shield, mainly touristic image of Andean folklore. Political Credibility-seekers now have an excuse to reconsider, as the music of the neglected black community of Peru is here given the introduction it deserves. One almost suspects David Byrne — since this is another of his brandishes — of being able to churn out a great compilation in nearly any genre. For a while, his stab at Brazilian folk left me wondering whether great pop existed anywhere else, now I know it does in Peru.

The Peruvian tradition was born of the slave trade which transported Africans to the country's remote coasts. There, African sounds mingled with Spanish and indigenous ones in a mix not dissimilar to that which occurred in Cuba. There is undoubtedly a kinship in instrumentation and rhythm between Afro-Peruvian music and Afro-Cuban son montuno, but the former retains an attachment to depth of feeling and poetry all its own, and which I must attempt to define as continental (Surrounded not only by the elements but also by a multitude of peoples and civilisations, continentalers develop a common obsession with their place, in contrast to isolated islanders.) Indeed, the most striking of the tracks here display an attention to meaning which would sound too contrived in a Cuban context, as well as a pronounced European input by classically trained arrangers.

Thus, the first verse of Chabuata Grande's "Una Larga Noche" is coloured by d'arnet, oboe, flute, French horn and cello. While "No Me Cumbear" and "Encuentro Candelá" are more ribald preoccupations, though no less gracefully, the choice of "Mara Lando" as an opener, also composed by the elderly Chabuata Grande, shows real taste, for it is a unique masterpiece of songwriting and performance in which Magic and Social Realism, African swing, and European weariness join forces. The song also concludes the collection, the time sung by Byrne himself, but while he is surprisingly convincing as a Spanish crooner, he still falls short of making the song sound quite as good second time around and the very idea ends up smelling of clumsy narcissism. A small flaw then, in what is otherwise a collection of gems.

STYLISTE BALAZARD

Various Artists Wildflowers: The New York Loft Jazz Sessions Volumes One/Two/Three

DOUGLAS MUSIC 30003 324252 CD

Three releases together providing a snapshot of New York's loft jazz scene recorded in May 1976 at Sam Rivers's Studio Ribes, which had by then been going for six years.

Over the years, the loft scene has been mythologised as the last great (wildflowering of black free jazz. How does it all sound now? Patchy is the answer — judicious editing could have cut this set down by at least one CD without reducing its documentary impact. But what's good is excellent.

There's a strong sense of the prevailing collective vibe, which is hardly surprising given that many of the key players have roots in either the Black Artists Group (Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, Harriet Blumenthal) or the Association For The Advancement Of Creative Musicians (Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, Leo Smith). The music seems free energies coalescing around the problem of structure, with material ranging from long, rolling blues pieces through complicated frameworks for improvisation to open blowing pastures.

Self-censorship and focus weren't always what this scene was about: some solos ramble aimlessly and electric basses are plucked. However, a piece such as Roscoe Mitchell's 25 minute "Chant" demonstrates that the possibilities opened by 60s free jazz weren't exhausted yet. The material by Leo Smith (with Anthony Davis) and Julius Hemphill is formidable organised and testifies to the discipline and seriousness of the best of what was going on in the lofts. There is good work too by Sam Rivers himself, as well as Jimmy Lyons, Sunny Murray and Marion Brown. Sound is just about adequate but, 20 years later, proper liner notes would have been a bonus.

There is a feeling of struggle here, both against a hostile industry and the disintegration of the jazz public. These are issues which point up the importance of the subsequent Black Saint and Soul Note studio recordings of many of these musicians. Like those albums, the Wildflowers set doesn't hit the button every time, but it's an important document of a vital and overlooked stage in jazz.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Nana Vasconcelos Storytelling

HEMPHISPHERE 7233 843 444 CD

The disappointing thing about this collection from the Brazilian master percussionist is that it lives up to its title. All the pieces are seamlessly arranged and tightly hitched to an agenda — be evocative at all costs. Vasconcelos is one of those percussionists who seem to have more limbo than mere mortals and who can touch any object you care to name and make it speak. But he sometimes seems a little too aware for comfort of his job's shamanic aspects, which can lead to a terrible

preciousness. Anyone who's cringed at a concert while he's persuaded the whole audience to make swooshing sounds and turn itself into the very rainforest will know what I mean.

It may have something to do with Brazil's cultural diversity and sheer size, but Brazilian musicians do seem to have a recurring desire to capture their country's spirit in vast synthesising evocations — Milton Nascimento's 1990 *Taxi* being another example. Storytelling is a kind of aural travelogue by voice and percussion, with Vasconcelos conjuring up the elements ("Wind Calling Wind"), the geography ("A Day In The Amazon", "Northeast") and his own memory (various songs using children's chants). It's evocative, sure, and certainly enveloping, but it's too obviously programme music. It too knowingly sets its cap at the listener's capacity to conjure up pictures.

Gerald Seligman's stencils classify the songs rather off-puttingly as "musical landscapes or ambient narratives, perhaps even sonic suites" — and undoubtedly he's right. But Vasconcelos doesn't leave enough to the imagination — you feel that the chants, the rattling berimbau and cowbells, the odd dropped-in sample of fado accordion, tell you exactly what to see. It's all a touch portentous, too, and the stabbing strings of the opening "Curtain", a collaboration with ex-Ambrosio Lovers keyboard player Peter Scherer, set the tone. The record's at its best when Vasconcelos drops into song mode, as on the sprightly samba "Clementina (No Tereiro)", because the songs paradoxically provide less direct stimuli to the inner ear than the overwrought confessions of supposed abstraction. In fact, it's real abstraction that's missing

here. Seligman calls these "soundtracks to films not yet filmed", and a Vasconcelos soundtrack proper could well be a wonder. But standing on its own, the music does too much of the work, leaving you to stand by and marvel. If Storytelling were a film it would be *Koyaanisqatsi* — a lavishing of elemental awe and too much of a balm to the lazy imagination.

JONATHAN ROWNEY

Victory Of The Better Man

... gegen Brot ...

CMP 69 CD

Victory Of The Better Man have fashioned, from an attic trunk of odd materials, an immensely enjoyable second album (their first, which I'd like to hear now, was 1991's *L'Utopiste*, also on CMP). Some of gegen Brot seems familiar: Just as the jazz boom artists of the late 60s picked up on the sounds and gestures of the Blue Note era, gegen Brot somehow evokes the rock-meets-art music-meets jazz mélange of the late 60s and early 70s — no breadheads or time-wasters. Plus enough long reverbs and enigmatic phrases to keep Blue Nile and Scott Walker fans happy in the long gaps between their heroes' releases.

Harald Bernhard, the lead singer, has a nice, craggy style reminiscent of Phil Minton on Lindsay Cooper's *Sohara Dust* (a poetry-based project that could have done with some of the studio time lavished on this album). Bernhard moves easily from spoken word to rough-edged song. "Why I Am Not A Farmer" develops from poetry reading over guitar and percussion groove (with jazzy noodling by sax player Pourpain Pamelux) to a cyclical rock chord sequence that could have come from an early album by Family. The title track and "Anniversary On The Island" cruise over fretless riffs by bassist Matthias Kratzstein. The line-up is completed by guitarist UK Rattay and sound engineer/violinist Walter Kurmus, plus drummer Marc Lehman for the more rockist moments.

Some of the stuff is through-composed but most of it is freely improvised or the result of long, transfused studio nights. VOTBM (or at least CMP) call the style "free pop", and though there's not much in the way of verse/chorus structure, there are plenty of hooks and great

soundcheck

noses. Whenever things get really wild, there's usually a rhythm guitarist to hand, dying to get back into a groove.

Distinctly ungroovy is the 'pocket opera' *"Die Taschenoper"*, complete with a tiny audience clapping and coughing and the authentic minimalist sound of multiple page turning — VOTBM manage to be peculiar and funny ha-ha at the same time. Another opera track is 'tadden', unfilmed, at the end of the CD. So the album is good, but it's not consistent enough to be the killer release (We're Only In It For The Bread?) that VOTBM promise to deliver some day. International stardom, plenty of gigging and a producer should help.

JOHN L. WALTERS

Wordsound The Red Shift

WORD SOUND WS 001 CD

Crooklyn Dub Consortium Certified Dope Volume One

WORD SOUND WS 003 CD

Scarab Seshambh Project

WORD SOUND WS 005 CD

Wordsound is a New York label styling itself as a 'guerrilla think tank'. Label boss is SH Fernando (author of *The New Beats*, a critical investigation of Hip-Hop culture) and his aim is to promote the underground. The means to this end is dub.

In the beginning was the version. The sweet joy of dub was bound up with the erotic pressure of the ghostly vocal on the skin of the mix. Dub was loosed from its versioning function long ago. It became a virus capable of unlicking the fixates that hold other genres together. No longer a version of a tune, it became a version of the world, an almost infinitely adaptable repertoire of methods to undermine the world-as-we-know-it. The privileged twosome of space and bass could, it seemed, be ejected into any environment.

But someone lost the plot somewhere along the way. Instead of libidinal promise we got bass lines with the subtlety and seamlessness of a Jean-Claude Van Damme. One hesitates to call on the masters to criticise the latterday mutations of the form, but there was a lightness to the work of Lee Perry or



Ninety (even on two-note bass line material like the latter's 'Westbound Train (Version)') that makes most of the Wordsound product look sullen and narcissistic, matching the 'soulless' poverty of UK dig-dub.

Besides the governing rubric of dub, the subsidiary reference points are legion: *The Red Shift* picks up on Arabic music, Hip-hop, funk — you name it. But the principal dash throughout is between slowed-down mid-90s beats and deep reggae-derived bass. Like all the Wordsound products listed above, it's patchy, the high point being the snister rap and whipcrack snare of 'Conditional Critical', the barrel-scraping nadir being the absurdly constrained bass line of 'Chicken Walk'. Generally that's the pattern — more nous in the drum programming than anywhere else.

Certified Dope Volume One is a compilation from assorted, elaborately pseudonymous Wordsounders. Corporal Blossom's 'Opportunity Dub' is lively among a sample-heavy brew, but as for the rest of it, you find yourself admiring the makers' record collections more than their own creations. Bill Laswell (surprise, surprise) and Sly Dunbar contribute the album's softest piece.

On the Scarab album (the second and better of the two they've made for the fledgling label) African Head Charge and The Master Musicians Of Joujouka collide in the depths of a fairly treacly mix. Obscuration as a pastime: there's one fantastic track but otherwise it doesn't live up to its manifest promise and floats off down the Nile instead.

Laswell and Adrian Sherwood cast their long shadows over the Wordsound ethos. As with so much of their work, the ideals more promising than the end product. Perhaps the margin-versus-mainstream model is too cosy to sustain much invention these days. After all, some things remain underground because no one's got any reason to like them, to be secret isn't necessarily to be subversive. A space worth watching nevertheless — something great might come out of Wordsound some day but it ain't there yet.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Neil Young Mirrorball

REPRISE 9362 45934 CD/VC

There appears to be no end to the current Neil Young renaissance. I

suppose the germ of this particular release was his astounding live performance at the MTV awards a few years back accompanied by Pearl Jam, when he managed to cook up a musical storm while staggering about the stage like some deranged old hippy.

Pearl Jam provide the backing on this new album which should confound the critics: the man who can do no wrong with the group who can do no right (if you take the standard British rock press view). In fact, all the material on *Mirrorball* was written by Young with the exception of some of the lyrics to 'Peace And Love' written by Eddie Vedder. Pearl Jam provide some of the tightest electric backing that Young's ever had. The feel of *Mirrorball* is very different from his last consistently electric studio session *Ragged Glory*, and from last year's patchy *Sleeze With Angels*.

From 'Song X' through to 'Big Green Country', the opening piece is unrelenting, streamlined and direct. There's precious little of the wandering, feedback-drenched soling of *Ragged Glory*, but a pounding sense of defiance and a sort of melancholy euphoria evoked by the combination of the gloomy, metaphysical lyrics with the whipped-up garage thrash of the music. The sound is dense and 'live' in other words, unreconstructed rock with few frills.

With 'Truth Be Known' the mood changes to a shimmering buzz, but the lyrics deal with more individual concerns — 'When the fire that once was your friend burns your fingers to the bone'. *Mirrorball*'s lyrical stock in trade largely consists of shattered illusions and the passing of an era (the 60s) — as typified by the mirrorball itself, twirling in some half-forgotten ballroom as the hippies 'dance the Charleston and they do the limbo' ('Downtown') — contrasting with the murderous decline of contemporary America seen through a survivor's eyes ('I Saw Your Hatred Down', 'Scenery').

Far removed from the posturing and backbiting of the 'alternative' US rock scene, Neil Young keeps pushing ahead, unpredictable save for the continued quality of his output, the antithesis of a complacent old 60s/70s rock star. *Mirrorball* represents a certain purity, however atavistic, and a kind of striving for grace within limited confines. It produces great music.

TOM RIDGE

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in brief jazz/Improv

Ben Watson straddles on top of a mountain of new jazz

Ab Baars Trio Sprok

BVHAAS/GEESTGRONDEN GG14 CD Ab Baars plays a lot of clarinet. It is the correct instrument for his limpid classroom, as if the cool spaces of naturalistic still life had opened over improvisation. Baars sometimes screws up the melodic line into tangles, but drummer Martin van Duynhoven is of the Steve Noble school and remains clean, flexible and witty. Stravinsky-esque march rhythms occasionally recall Henry Cow but there is no English whimsy. Pretty, unassuming stuff

Floridis/Kowald

Papadopoulos Pyrkia AND KATO 2001 CD Free improvisation reaches Thessalonika. Ilias Papadopoulos bows a lyre, Floridis Floridis blows clarinet and flute. They've imported Peter Kowald, legendary bassist and vocal-didgeridoo. Ethnic music in its wild, oriental, untamed raw form enters the random, urban, moment-attentive world of free improvisation without a nod to the usual mediators (taverna pop, disco, "World Music" jazz). The results are exhilarating: at times they come close to Odysseus-era Blood Ulmer, but their apt equation of acoustic folk and improv focus keeps everything humble. Fascinating (and better than the Aro labels' other release featuring Floridis, *Wutu Wutu*, which is directionless and timbrally barren by comparison)

Hofmann/Burgener/Rieben

Uff FOR 4 EARS 617 CD Adam's first wife, reportedly written out of history for King to fuck on top, lends her name to a Swiss trio. Ursula Hofmann (piano), Hans Burgener (violin), Margrit Rieben (drums). There's a fulsome quality to the playing here which is salutary in a free scene that often seems to restrict itself to illegitimate instrumental sounds and cancelled expression. Rieben's drums are conceived as sound as well as rhythm, occasionally summoning up visions of undertakers sewing up coffins. Hofmann's vocabulary is wide and trenchant, recalling our own great Alex Maguire. Burgener's violin has a Billy Bangish ability to scythe between atonality and jazz. All kinds of music are

plied in here, but the interplay is immediate and unnumbered: chilling Webern melts into Grappelli japes at the turn of a screw. At the end of the disc you feel like you've just been on a sledge ride over the rubble of musical history. Fabulous.

Charles Lloyd All My Relations

ECM 1557 CD Even when Coltrane was alive, Charles Lloyd had few qualms about copying him; along with that other ham of pseudo-inspiration, Keith Jarrett, he went down a storm with the hippies at San Francisco's Fillmore. The ECM label has long been associated with a resigned, classical version of the modal jazz of Miles and Coltrane. So Lloyd on ECM provides the expected, amiably expansive piano (Bobo Stenson), wilderness bass (Anders Jormin). Occasionally, Lloyd's tenor develops a special edge, but his accompanists only have an ear for his conventional side — the Trane muzzin, the Sonny Rollins gaggle. "Hymne To The Mother" has inside-the-piano knocks and scrapes, but all is subordinated to the somnolent, ethnic. Boring.

Allen Lowe/Roswell Rudd

Woyzeck's Death ENJA 9005 CD Decent progressive hard bop, a suite written by renegade Lowe around quotes from Georg Büchner's 1837 social protest shocker. Andy Shapiro's synth part is fetching, in this resolutely non-fusion environment, its orchestral whirrings sound pleasingly alien. Rudd's trombone is poised and richly vocal (though his two compositions are forgettable). Cool and somewhat academic, Lowe's music is both a refreshing antidote to the flurry of "avant" and a thoughtful redeployment of bop conventions too often left to brandied neo-conservatives.

Myra Melford Extended

Ensemble Even The Sounds Shine HAT HUT 6161 CD Energetic jazz by five Americans caught in Wuppertal in 1994. Melford is evidently a brilliant pianist, but we don't get enough of her daring, disruptively rhythmic playing. Drummer Reggie Nicholson has some great parts, too. Maybe some confusion at the conceptual level can explain why Marty Ehrlich (alto, clarinet) and Dave Douglas (trumpet) never seem to engage Melford's elan: doesn't seem to have translated to her ensemble.

Pino Minafra Sud Ensemble

Sud Ensemble VICTO 034 CD Pino Minafra (trumpet), Carlo Dato (sax) and Giorgio Occhipinti (keyboards) have made ripples with The Italian Instabile Orchestra and Occhipinti's Nonet. The Sud Ensemble wants to be an extravagant, darkly humorous force, but there's a complacency behind the bawling which prevents it reaching the pitch of Henry Threadgill's Very Very Circus or Christian Vander's Magma, the arrangements have none of the carefully researched subversion of Willem Breuker. A stab at populist avant-garde that fails at the first hurdle: play something new.

David Murray Big Band South Of The Border

DW 897 CD The opening bars of "St Thomas" contain everything that makes jazz such a vital contribution to 20th century existence: beneath a joyously slapdash rendition of a fake calypso, Fred Hopkins improvises a bass part so independent and fresh it makes you want to scream. Murray can inspire the combination of focus and bisterous liberty that made Duke Ellington's orchestra so exciting (worlds away from the prissy tightness of Wynton Marsalis's Lincoln Center drods). James Spaulding (alto), Don Byron (clarinet) and Craig Harris (trombone) are the guarantee of great solos, while Pance Higgins — a revelation on Muihal Abrams's last tour — is superb. Murray plays "Flowers For Albert" for the umpteenth time and still finds new things in it. Like Coleman Hawkins with "Body And Soul", Murray's perpetual reinvention of this tune has become a wonder.

John Patton Minor Swing

DW 896 CD Big John Patton's paddlesreamer organ provides a regular, bluesy context for John Zorn's sax-fold-in of Jim Nor, razor bebop and gut-busting eruption. Zorn displays his usual flair for inventive historical exegesis, his squealing pyrotechnics on "The Way I Feel" link hardcore extremity to R&B horking (and Pat Patrick). The cover — in shiny black glazed cardboard, a micro version of a classic Impulse! gatefold — is what CDs should have had from the start (instead of the bastard cassette-inspired jewel-box). Gustaf Ed Cherry and drummer Kenny Wollesen are subdued but fine. Like so many of the items Zorn himself

Locust

Truth is Born of Arguments

New Album
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soundcheck

has brought to market, this is a drool-inducing commodity (though one awaits with impatience Zorn's encounter with the king of the Hammond, Jimmy McGriff).

Wayne Peet Trio Fully Engaged 9 WINDS NW0165 CD What Nucleus would have sounded like if Ian Carr weren't such a crabby, bureaucratic geek: boiling, fleshy fusion, the rough end of *Bitches Brew*. Peet plays organ and everything is drenched in the uprush cascade of that instrument's churchy power. Drummer Lance Lee and guitarist GE Stron create an ensemble sound that bypasses the diddy show-off individualism of jazz rock. Simple but effective musical ideas provide rough-hewn events. Without the harmonic courage to be Pinki Zoo, this nevertheless has an attractive, slabby integrity.

Polwechsel Polwechsel RANDOM ACUSTICS RA009 CD Composition for improvisers does not have to result in the gamished clatter of a Jon Lloyd or Barry Guy. Here, Werner Dafeldecker (bass, guitar) and Michael Moser (cello) operate like Luigi Nono, they organize events that intergate the processes of sound production. Along with Radu Palam (trombone) and Burkhard Slang (electric guitar), they spin a tense, linear music almost hysterical in its focus. It is hard to credit that traditional instruments can actually make these sounds, let alone musicians array the results in such spindled webs of weird conjuncture. Polwechsel hear possibilities in the interstices of conventional (mbre). The effect is shoking, the inner self exorcised, your very guts pinned out on the dissection table. Scary and very, very special.

Positive Knowledge Another's Day Journey MUSIC & ARTS 842 CD PK's Olympe Thomas is one half of a boss clannet: heart, someone to remind you that the heart of jazz is finding a voice, that magical dialectic between vocal specificity and universal technique. He's got better lower register definition than David Murray (no fuzz) and his time sense is nina-sharp. On C-melody sax his confiding tone has the unharmed authority of true jazz, everything David Sanborn and Mike Brecker lack. "Inward Connections" is a sax-drum battle that moves into new territories of refined shimmer. Vocalist and percussionist Ijeoma Thomas comes from black beat poetry (hip, arbitrarily lengthened vowels



and staccato consonants) to spin up impressive structures, spontaneously riding on an assured harmonic grasp. Use of silence and small sounds (bamboo flutes, birdcalls) shows awareness of John Cage and Chicago free playing (there's praise from Brandon on the cover). Charles Gayle is not the only proof that a black avant garde survived the 70s, gems like this are simply harder to unearth.

Matthew Shipp Quartet Critical Mass 2 1361 009 CD No free jazz pianist can avoid the legacy of Cecil Taylor. Hard, angular, modernist, all facile evocation is eschewed in pursuit of raw instrumental interaction. Viewed from the easy chair of traditional tonality, it's relentlessly bleak and cerebral, but for fans of immersion in the physicality of music-making it's a breeze. On *Critical Mass* (released on Henry Rollins's label), pianist Shipp's troubled gospel creates emotive blocks worth hearing about; Mat Maneri's post-Leroy Jenkins violin leaves skidmarks in every chordal gateway, and William Parker's bluesy push on bass puts another question mark by the 'cerebral' tag. Wily Dickey's drums are bindingly apt. Intense application to minutiae produces a vastness of terrifying dimensions. Proof that Wynton Marsalis's version of jazz history is a spectacular bluff away from the limelight, the avant garde thrives.

Snake Eyes Pair A' Dice RANDOM ACUSTICS RAD10 CD Quickfire duets between Joker Nies (MIDIotics) from a laptop and Jeffrey Morgan (squeaks and squarks from an alto sax). Their fastidious approach pays dividends: Nies's tasty palette of orchestral sounds provokes sour chirps from the alto. The two players plunge into each other's soundworlds like the quivering proboscis of Keith Haring mutants. It's produced by the great Georg Graewe, released on his exemplary Random Acoustics label and available in elegant black cardboard. What more could you want?

Gebhard Ullmann Basement Research SQU NOTE 121271 CD The German neo-minimalist meets a longstanding Brooklyn trio: Elery Eskelin (tenor), Drew Gross (bass), and Phil Hayes (drums). All four are spiky players but here never seem to lift off. Eskelin's *Figures Of Speech*, made for the same label two years back, was wonderful, but here we

never get away from Ullmann's unexceptional tunes (not helped by the fact that no tracks exceed six minutes). Why write tunes if you're not creating surprise? Dull.

in brief outer limits

Bibio Kop-Jones himself in the realm of the strange noise

Bad Sector Ampos GOD FACTORY 33 CD For Bad Sector, read bad faith — that is, the feel-off factor that is presently despoiling the sandy shores where the Ambient whale has beached itself. From Italy, BS might not be too sure how they're descending to feel about the darkness descending on all things electronic, but their ambivalence is their virtue. Like cave-dweller paintings, their music's more descriptive than prescriptive. Their dredge of dragging, Montecore-like chords churns up a muddy, pagan sense of fear and awe before the forces that have wasted desaster upon them. The ideal soundtrack for scuppering unwanted North Sea of ngs to Someone should send a copy to Shell.

Black State Choir Pachakuti POCO PP 119 CD On their second CD, BSC take up the pursuit of the Ugly Spirit where the likes of 23 Skidoo and Industrial-era Cabaret Voltaire left off. They fashion a bracing fusion of Fourth World funk noir and chill electronics, further enlivened with some deft touches like the tuneless piano motif pounded into the opening track "Gorta Mor" and the Barry Adamson-like guitar tacked across the eddying rhythms of "Homertary Diva". Pity BSC aren't so nimble with the soundbites that seggest their pursuit of said spirit. If they're meant to inoculate the world against false gods and phony science, their viral samples more likely flatter and fatten their targets with the unnecessary attention.

Chris Cochran Bath AVANT AVANT 042 CD Formerly of NYC No Wave jazzpunkers No Safety, Chris Cochran solo enters that select group of severely dysfunctional singer/songwriters who can intone the simplest of lines — "reminds me of you", repeated to fade out ("Residual") — in such an unwhining way you end up calling Homicide. Sung with raked cadence to sawtooth-sample

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electric rock, his songs have the raw, ripping impact of one-night stands, whose brute swift satisfactions cannot keep the devastating loneliness from slamming in on the back of his tormented guitars

ELPiE Vs Coil Worship The Glitch

ESKATON 006 CD On first hearing, the sounds like a collection of those efforts Coil keep to farm out to the millions of compilers who pester them for contributions. But Coil have always seen it as their task to digitally transmute shit into gold, and under their ELPiE guise they work soiled sound samples into beguilingly abstract patterns suggested by the source's original texture. Listen closely and you're likely to be tugged deep inside that queasy acid comedown state where exhausted insect buzzes sound like heavenly chort. It's not always a pleasant feeling, but ride it out and you're usually glad enough to have been there to volunteer to go back in again

Fred Frith Middle Of The Moment

RECREC RECDEC 60 CD A whole other kind of trip, *MOM* is Frith's follow-up to the documentary *Step Across The Border*. Likewise, this disc isn't so much a soundtrack as an aural recreation, a diatribe caught up in the trackwinds of a film crosscutting Europe and North Africa, which incorporates the field recordings, nature sounds, spoken voices and songs picked up en route. As ever, Frith is as much a sensitive listener as a composer. That is, he rightly contributes the minimum of music necessary sonically to bind his disparate source materials into a singular sound world without homogenizing the life out of them

Brannon Hurngness Virtual Symphony No 1: Inaudible Silence

MULTIHOOD HMC 019 CD Normally, massed guitar symphonies don't so much collapse under their own weight as spiral out of sight once the ballooning concert of their windbag composers is prodded. Though Hurngness has hung out with Glenn Branca, he hasn't yet saddled himself with Glenn's sophistry, even if the 'Virtual' tag to this 'symphony' is a feeble get-out clause. The music itself, however, works a treat for being studio-treated after the live fact: Hurngness poops patches of recorded guitar feedback into great swimming frequency oceans. By manipulating its currents, he

forces the massed noise to release clusters of overtones that disperse and recombine in new forms. The music's best during atmospheric passages like "Immersion", where the dense mass becomes a watery transmitter of long-drawn voices and melodies

Philip Jeck Loopholes TOUCH

TOUCH 26 CD The loop 'n' scratch method Jeck made infamous with his *Wyn!* Recluse installation for 180 Danette players has more than mere novelty value. The music rising out of the method affords a glimpse of the future through the prisms of past records. The advantage that obsolescent avant garde tricks for tape and vinyl have over sample loops is their very unreliability. Tape loops eventually stretch out of phase, antique record player speeds are apt to falter. Jeck brings such flaws into play as an extra chance element in pieces already abounding in pleasures and surprises from the way he resolves the textural and timbral dashes of his various mismatched sound sources

Illusion Of Safety From Nothing To Less CONSPIRACY CPD9501 CD Impact Test Maps, Not Words DAMNED SHIP WORKS DS 5D CD

Because it's becoming increasingly rare to hear unadorned real-time improvisation as a beginning and end in itself, rather than as sampler fodder, it's tempting to over-value those few specimens who persist in the practice. The best thing about these two American groups is their drive towards silence. Before you yell, "Can't they drive faster?", check out the wily way *Illusion Of Safety* seduce audiences into focusing on the threshold of audibility. When they raise the noise level to slaughterhouse frenzy it's yet more powerful for the silences that bracket it. Impact Test used to be Wisconsin's Neubauten wannabees. Boy Dirt Car until the riots that habitually dogged their performances prompted a career reappraisal. Riot cops can rest assured that the time when audiences were similarly aroused by the kind of tepid improvisations it's making is long passed

Kang Tae Hwan Kang Tae Hwan CHAP CHAP CD 001 CD Alto saxophonist

Kang leads South Korea's first and it says here, only free jazz group. His is a calm, reflective approach to improvising expended out of circular breathing methods alternated with long, sinewy lines punctuated with the occasional jarring rasp. Recorded in Japan, the disc features Kang solo (pleasant enough) and in duet and trio formation with saxophonist Ned Rutherford (ditto) and turntable maestro Orono Yoshihide. Remarkable as ever, the latter's unpredictability quotient raises the improvisational heat considerably whenever he enters the picture

Merzbrow Music For The Dead Man 2: Return Of The Dead Man ROBOT OT 7"

Never a man to pass up a chance at breaching taboos — at least not on disc — it was just a matter of time before Tokyo nosemeister Hisamichi Aoki got to necrophilia, or whatever you call the vice for forcibly making it with zombies. "The Dead Man" EP is his soundtrack for a Z-core Dutch film distributed by the German makers of the highly delectable *Nekromantik* series. Whatever the perversion, it's inspired Aoki to produce one of the most concentrated and thrilling bursts of noise since Nori's "Rese" single some 15 years back. The cover shot of bleaching skulls and bones scattered across a beach summarises its terrible beauty perfectly

Paccarica Low 948 KICKIN KICK 20 CD

In other eras, musos have had to submit themselves to no end of humiliation when they jumped passing bandwagons. Today, the studio anonymity of Ambient at least spares them the sort of shaming, mutch-dressed-as-lamb spiky hair and candystrype pants garb which earlier chances had to adopt to pass themselves off as 'New Wave'. Paccarica comprises two players who have in the past backed Gregory Isaacs, Herbie Andie, Grace Jones and Thomas Dolby. Somebody must have told them that congo-ed out transglobal culture infected with paranoia was all the rage and, furthermore, easy to do. Well, the way they do it, it is

PUC Recorded Through Walls PUC P0004 CD

Attempting the possible musics already mapped out by Jon Hassell and Brian Eno in their Fourth World series is hardly the riskiest

undertaking. But if everyone has to start somewhere, then PUC at least have the good grace to go off at a few tangents. Not unattractively, they set loops spinning lazily through spaces marked out by occasional Cooder-ish guitar or more standard beatbox rhythms. But something's missing here: their various mentors' sense of space, precisely. Someone should dub it into them that it's not necessary to shade in the entire canvas, especially not with the pastel washes they sometimes pass off as ambience

Spacebow Big Waves NOTERWORKS NW 5001 CD

Paul Schutze might have coined the phrase as an album title, but 'apture of metals' most accurately describes the truly ravishing low end musics produced by Berlin's Spacebow. *Big Waves* is performed on a giant steel cello and low chime invented by Robert Rutman, and played by himself and producer/arranger/composer/arranger Carsten Tiedemann. The burned bowing of tensile steel churns up deep drones whose long delay times overlap to create intoxicating clouds of overtones. Fortunately, the two composers keep their heads as they explore the various dark folds of reverberation and resonance, leaving us listeners here to gaze ours completely

Various Artists The Throne Of Drones SOBMENT D952 CD

Ordinarily, a label could get away with claiming to represent the dark side of Ambient, but when it shares art time with a group like Coil (see above), whose sounds are generated from decidedly weird impulses, you gotta come up with something more than the sideways snakecharmer musics that crowds the particular territory. *Throne Of Drones* features, among others, desert guru Steve Roach (disappointing as ever), Vidna Obmana (dreadier here than on his own Extreme Release), Jeff Greinke (never, as stated in Koop's last column, a member of *Illusion Of Safety*, damn who the apologies are owed to) and the ho-hum atmospheric of Biosphere. One piece is worth the price of admission: Marjanne Amich's "Sound Characters", a simple, yet compelling piece worked up from the rubbing together of a set of deep throats and a piercing core drone. □

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Peter Hammill

Continued from page 33
experience just being pissed off and not loving and hating what you do. With music that's got to be there — loving it, hating it, being incredibly frustrated by it. Why's it so slow? Why's it so fast? [Grits teeth] And why can't I do this? If you lose that, you're lost completely. You've admitted you can't do it on your own.

ERASURE

"Love To Hate You" from *The First 20 Hits* (Mute)

He [Erasure's vocalist Andy Bell] was very good on *The Fall Of The House Of Usher* — I've guessed of course who it is. He worked incredibly hard and fast at it. It's not the easiest stuff to sing. He was great.

Were you aware of Bell's stuff prior to that?

Peripherally, in that peripheral pop world. I was aware of his voice. It's clear that not just in Erasure but going right through Vince Clarke's stuff there has been a constant thread — that's how he hears pop. So it falls into that category — yes it's pop music but it's honest and it's there.

How did you get to collaborate with him? The connection at first was Lene Lovich who was involved from way, way back. She suggested us to him and him to us. So then he came down just to try and see how it was. And of course there was no written music involved in *Usher* at all. So all of the singers had to learn it. I sung all the parts and said, "There you go — but this tune really is the tune and you can't scat around it." He tried it out, was great at it and did it.

It seemed on paper an unlikely collaboration.

They were all unlikely. Lene would possibly seem to be the closest. I didn't and still don't want *Usher* to be viewed as just another album in the Peter Hammill endless flow — so the fact of having entirely disparate people involved was OK. Sarah Jane Morris wouldn't have seemed likely but I've worked with her before on a very good Japanese CD by Kazuo Sawa, who is a classical Japanese koto player. And Herbert [Gronemeyer] — people wouldn't know about him here but in Germany they certainly would — and it's as, if not even more, unlikely that he would be involved in something like this.

Even though we called it an opera we

did not want operatic voices. We wanted to have singers who were used a) to singing neo-rock music, b) to articulating words. And within each given song there should be a degree of dramatic input — people who within the voice could act. So yeah, I think he did a fantastic job with minimal time and unfortunately minimal return in terms of visibility and event and so on. But who knows? It's not an entirely dead project. It needs to be performed really. That hasn't passed me by. But to do it is such a massive venture. The original idea was to have it released on CD, live performance and then have film performance simultaneously. Basically the funding didn't quite come through — as it often doesn't. At that point, having worked on it for 13 or 14 years, I had to finish it, it was such a monkey on my back.

JOHN COLTRANE

"Transition" from *Transition* (Impulse)

It was [David] Jackson [Van Der Graaf's sax player] who introduced me to Coltrane and [Archie] Shepp and all of this world, in the days of sharing beds and so on. We played Ascension fairly non-stop in the flat at the time. So again a world of relaxed concentration. And again I'm not a really authoritative buff [it represents] a life and a time of life and an attitude to music; that obviously I've never come remotely close to experiencing — the degree of commitment and belief to carry on doing this music, to invent this music in the first place, is mind boggling. Certain aspects of Van Der Graaf seemed to draw on this area of jazz — the intensity and improvisation. . .

Well both [Jackson] and Guy [Evans, drummer] came from the jazz world. In terms of a colour that would be so — because most of the time there wasn't a guitar and there certainly weren't that many horn players around in bands at the time. But what [Jackson] was playing on top of was not jazz. I love Coltrane and the sound and so on but long for the band to hit something solid sometimes. Guy obviously would understand what the drums are doing — I just don't get that. It's like the front end of things — so in terms of Van Der Graaf there was a solid platform that made it different. Which is this from?

Transition, recorded in 1965.

The real ones for me are A Love

Supreme and Ascension they are classic. Apart from playing together, what is relevant here is there was this process which kind of verges into the influences part. In the process of Van Der Graaf we did all come from different disciplines. I was more the soul man, blues man, Hendrix, David [Jackson] was almost exclusively Coltrane and Shepp, Barton was more classical stuff as well as Hendrix, Guy had very catholic stuff, lots of jazz stuff. So there was this thing of just playing things to each other. Right, it's my turn to stick something on. There was a kind of osmosis of taste and also an osmosis of attitude, because it turned out that what everyone could agree on had this same, slightly manic quality.

EDGARD VARÈSE

"Intégrales" from *Passport Pour Le XX Siècle* (Aurville Montaigne)

Is this the basic of some other tune trying to break out there, some traditional tune? Almost sounds like a bit of Ravel trying to break through it's Varèse.

Ah, right. Well I wouldn't have known that because I don't know any Varèse apart from the immortal quote that 'the duty of every modern day composer is not to die', or something, that Zeppa constantly quoted. I've never heard any Varèse — Liget was more my man.

We were going to play you Liget, but we seem to play him for everyone.

[Laughs] Oh, really? Well I have to say there is an element of humour here which is also there, I think, in Liget. I once went to a Liget concert where he gave a lecture. It was great because he was being very clear about saying, 'in the next piece there is this comic bit — a lot of people don't think there is any humour in my music but I think there are some very funny bits.' [With this] I really thought there was some traditional tune that was fractured and being reassembled.

According to the sleeve notes, the use of very high and low tones in this piece was seen as the origin of techniques later used in electronic music and musique concrète.

[Looks at CD insert.] You only get it by reading. It says, 'Can be observed on the score.' So there one's into the land of music you listen to by reading. It either gets to somebody or doesn't get to somebody. If you have to read about it to have it happen, it's not happening.

JOHN LEE HOOKER

"Walking The Boogie" from *Chess Checkmate* (JME compilation tape)

The important thing about John Lee Hooker is that he didn't play 12-bar blues. His riffs were always a little bit angular and chaotic. He was precisely in this kind of not playing 4/4 but sounding like it was generally in fours. The sloping and sliding all the time was a great force of his. He's hanging and pushing and pulling all the time rather than saying it's got to be [beats fist into palm] bang, bang, bang, straight on. [Referring to echoed stomp and double-tracked vocals] It's got that early studio experimentation. It's quite bizarre actually — like the Prog rock version!

So were you a young blues man?

I was a young blues man but it was obviously derived from British groups talking about the blues. This would be 63/64/65. So then it was Muddy Waters John Lee Hooker, Sonny Boy Williamson, that urban stuff — even later than that, when it was really electric and the guitar sound is recognisable as the guitar sound now. And there was the form of — here are songs, you can write songs and they are simple and they have riffs. That's the way that I stumbled in and wrote this absolutely appalling collection of 15-year old blues songs, lacking only that somewhat essential ingredient: a life that one has lived and experienced that one has had. God, the mind cringes! But that's when I started to write, rather than trying to write pop songs. On the other hand I was trying to get into the riff and particularly from John Lee Hooker this idea of riffs that go funny on you somehow. A riff is still one of the central things for me. They're still hard to find, though. To get one that works you have to have a good day.

On the surface it seems an unusual connection between your music and Hooker's.

I realised I'm not going to be a blues writer because I'm a middle class 15 year old prat, so why try? But what I like about it is there's a riff happening, so I'll try to do something that's true to me. Actually it's not so strange. It's a direct parallel, I've just been doing things out of my own experience. Seriously, in all of those riffs, if there's been an origin, it's John Lee Hooker and Hendrix. But Hendrix also came through the same thing — he was the inheritor of all that tradition, especially the riff-world. So it's a straight line really. □

print run

New music books — read, raved about, routed

In this month's books section:

Pop and Improv confronting academia; a black music tract reassessed; plus a new history of American composers

Putting Popular Music In Its Place

By Charles Hamm

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS (Hbk \$40)

A dry title for an important yet ultimately frustrating collection of essays. Hamm is an academic and trained musicologist — but he writes accessibly. At the heart of his book is what turns out to be a paradox: "Popular music, like all music, is both an acoustical and a social phenomenon and thus must be dealt with musically as well as culturally." But what is it to look at popular music musically as opposed to culturally?

His case studies are meant to give the answer. Hamm visited South Africa in the 70s and 80s and wrote on the insidious interrelation of apartheid with the music industry. "Rock 'n' Roll In A Very Strange Society", about the reception of rock 'n' roll among blacks and whites, was one result. Hamm examines why blacks soon lost interest in the music — and it had little to do with apartheid censorship. There's some very amusement on the way: visiting star Tommy Steele was in bewildered collision with the Afrikaaner view of "rūk-er-rol singers" ("Blamey, we've got some stuffed shirts in Britain, but nothing like some of the chaps you seem to have got here"). Other articles on South Africa — including one on Paul Simon's *Grazeland* — and China pursue the theme of society and popular music. Two pieces on George Gershwin look at the relation of popular art and music and the forms of criticism associated with the latter.

This is the theme of the most important essay, "Modernist Narratives And Popular Music." Hamm debunks these narratives, firstly "musical

autonomy", the idea that, "The essence and value of a piece of music resides in the text, in the music itself, not in its reception and use." Judged in this way, popular music is "artistically inferior" and not deserving of scholarly attention, except as a mirror of society. In contrast, "narratives of authenticity" value the "pure", "uncommercialised" music of ethnic or national groups, while the narrative of classic popular songs sets up a "popular canon". Hamm rejects this because it tries to "legitimise" popular music by misapplying the standards of "high culture".

He contrasts these dominant narratives with the position that "popular music has a life, a legitimacy and an ideology of its own", exemplified for Hamm in the writings of Charlie Gillett and Wilfred Mellers. Popular music, he writes, "is all music attacked or ignored in the literature governed by modernist narratives." In rejecting these, the music writer is, for instance, "free to consider Heavy Metal music as a valid cultural product [and subject] it to close musicological analysis of the sort previously reserved for classical music."

This may be a valid point, but Hamm sets himself up for something of a fall while making it. It may not be evident from the lofty towers of academia, but in the case of Heavy Metal, for instance, there are a number of writers — Joe Carducci, Robert Walser — already subjecting the music to close, musicological analysis. And of course, from Rolling Stone in the 60s to this magazine today, pop music writers have been struggling to establish something akin to a critical, if not always scholarly, literature on all aspects of popular music (and this ignores the mountain of words devoted

to musicological investigations of blues and jazz, which, lest we forget, were once the sole definition of popular music — yes, I know it's hard to believe).

As it is, Hamm is still searching in vain for "critical, scholarly literature on the music of Elton John, or Creedence Clearwater Revival, or Barbra Streisand, or even Stevie Wonder." Well, Elton John is already pushing it, and try Kylie Minogue, (Sir) Cliff Richard, Barry Manilow, Mantovani. And in any event, what is a "valid" cultural product anyway? Anything that isn't fake, kitsch or amateur? Or just anything? Maybe some kinds of music are just not worth listening to (as music), let alone having time spent analysing them. But that would go against Hamm's "value-free" approach, derived from John Gail's idiot put-down of criticism. The paradox is that "dealing with popular music musically" turns out to involve rather a lot of sociology. But Hamm's important book raises many more crucial questions than can be covered here.

ANDY HAMILTON

Black Talk

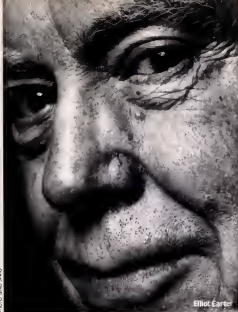
By Ben Sidran

PAYBACK PRESS (PBK \$8.95)

Originally published in 1971, *Black Talk* took its place among works like Lollo Jones's *Blues People*, Charles Keel's *Urban Blues* and AB Spellman's *Four Lives In The Be-Bop Business* as part of a criticism that made Black Liberation a new intellectual paradigm. As Cultural Studies gained academic currency, though, Sidran's sociological mapping fell out of favour with critics who embraced the writings of Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer as the way forward for theorising about the African diaspora. Now, as the love-in over the

Stevie Wonder





Elliot Carter

Internet has inspired a headlong rush back into McLuhanism, Sidran's cultural history of African-American music as a repository of oral culture in opposition to the Western literary tradition is due for re-evaluation.

Taking as its starting point McLuhan's assertion that literacy was breaking down in the face of the explosion of television, *Black Talk* reads black music, particularly jazz, as "not only a reflection of the values of black culture but, to some extent, the basis upon which it is built." Sidran sees the oral basis of African-American culture as its defining characteristic. Since there is nothing to mediate between experience and thought (like the printed page), people from an oral culture are inherently more perceptual than alienated Westerners. This lack of detachment allows music "to emerge as a potential foundation for social activity" because music changes the nature of perceptual information rather than thoughts and opinions.

Of course, we've heard this kind of thing a thousand times before. What's interesting about this fiction that blacks are somehow closer to nature than whites is that it has been used to prop up both racist and pro-black agendas and everything in between. Sidran's

novel best on this formulation, though, was that he seemed to predate by 15 years Jacques Attali's theory that music articulates fundamental changes in society before they can be put into words.

Unfortunately, Sidran's attempt to create a "musicology of society" can only reproduce the flawed conclusions of the masculinist and essentialist doctrines that caused the downfall of the Black Power movement. The efforts of Payback Press to reprint classics of black music criticism are certainly laudable (they have already republished *Blues People*), but given the cross of masculinity (both white and black), perhaps they should be embracing the truly futurist visions of Greg Tate and Samuel Delany rather than dispersely refusing to let go of the comfortable dualisms of old

PETER SHAPIRO

The History Of African-American Classical Music: MacDowell Through Minimalism

By John Warthen Struble
ROBERT HALE (HBK \$24.99)

I've always had a fondness for those Proteus Press maps in *The State Of The*

World Atlas — maps that are deliberately skewed to show, say, the proportion of single-parent families, the degree of exploitation, or the quantity of plutonium per worker, while avoiding or ignoring more obvious realities such as political boundaries or income in dollars. John Warthen Struble's map is skewed in a way that may annoy serious advocates of jazz, folk and popular music, but is nevertheless enormously useful since the ground he covers is as vast and sprawling as the country itself (as 'American', he means 'of the US').

He charts out three broad streams of American concert music composers — the academics (Sessions, Piston, Babbitt, Carter), the Americanists (MacDowell, Gershwin, Copland, Roy Harris) and the experimentalists (Ives, Cowell, Cage, Reich) and leaves the issue of whether jazz is the true American classical music to others.

Though he begins the history in 1620, most of the book is concerned with the past century, a time in which American music has been liberated from European influence (yet still willing to tie itself up in European knots on occasion). The chapters are organised by loose stylistic categories and generational groupings and Charles Ives and George Gershwin are granted a chapter each. Most of the book is constructed from capsule accounts of the composers' works and lives, many of which are spiced with personal details and a strong empathy for the difficulties of a composer's life.

Struble is always conscious of 'the test of time' and likes drawing attention to composers such as Otto Luening, whose music "still requires several generations of critical examination", and Henry Cowell, whose vast catalogue (close to 1000 works) "requires far more study, practice and interpretive thinking than many professional performers are willing to bestow upon it." Other entries are more distant in time but he is determined to include all the difficult B-roads — if not the dirt tracks — in his musical map. There are strict age limits to his efforts — Tod Machover (born 1953), merely listed in a table of New York composers, is the youngest person I could find here.

The book is big on lists, so we get a useful chronology, "significant American composers listed by State of origin", the fundamental repertoire, a bibliography

and an index that includes works as well as names. Struble is far-sighted and perceptive about a musical world in which "an unprecedentedly large number of obscure composers" are competing for "an ever-shrinking pool of performance resources and audiences" and suggests that Harry Partch and Pauline Oliveros may provide better models for the role of the creative artist in the next century. Despite his studied avoidance of pop and jazz he is able to point out, with amusement, that many of John Cage's values have "become the actual compositional, rehearsal and performance practice of an entire generation of contemporary rock musicians". In the last chapter he looks, with some trepidation, into the future of music. This is where the real John Warthen Struble stands up to be counted, with a plea for the opening of the American mind. He touches lightly on ideas and arguments explored in Adam Lively's brilliant *Sing The Body Electric*, which this book is (deliberately) too narrow to deal with.

Yet this is not a book that inspires an orgy of listening — it is far removed from, say, Geoff Oyer's *But Beautiful*, about American jazz, which earned the reader along with an intellectual and visceral passion for the music. For most of the time Struble's music maintains a scholarly, informative tone. But he does care about the music, and years for American listeners and musicians to grasp their native classical musical heritage — through education, technology and self-confidence.

JOHN L. WALTERS

Turning The Musical Table: Improvisation In Britain 1965-1990

By Nick Coulidy
RUBBERNECK (PBK £3)

Despite the inference in the title, this is not a history of the UK's hermetic improvised music scene: no narrative, no account of how musicians have survived playing what is such a deeply unpopular music, no mention of the clubs, the record labels, the grants. Coulidy is concerned with the ideological apparatus of improvisation, far indeed compared to the anecdotes and scandal of jazz and pop writing.

Coulidy is a musician himself (he's a

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member of the group Conspiracy) He begins with classical composers and their contempt for improvisation, a result of the hierarchical ranking of composer, performer and listener. The need to discard such "hierarchical modes of thought" (which will refer to as "HMT") becomes a continual refrain. Luckily, that does not entail discarding opinion or hierarchies of good and bad; his trenchant judgements are what give the writing style and lift.

Coudry believes art values transcend social ones and picks ideas from philosophers without heed to political conviction. It is hard to stomach Martin Heidegger, a fascist, being quoted next to Jacques Attali, Roland Barthes and Theodor Adorno as if all were engaged in the same crusade, some eternal mission to make the average man think more deeply. In other words, Coudry is your orthodox postmodernist, though the fact that he is arguing for recognition of an avant garde (a concept PoMo declares dead) makes his pitch interestingly problematic.

Coudry nods to the origins of free improvisation in 60s free jazz (Ornette Coleman, Coltrane, Albert Ayler). Thereafter his focus is high-cultural (although there is passing praise for Public Enemy's use of samples). As a critic, Coudry's judgements are shrewd. The dramatic, Stockhausen-like gestures of *Music Improvisation Company* are preferred to the stop-start pretentious of *Koyote*. The patient, large-scale structures and seriousness of AMM are preferred to either the zigzag hyperactivity of *Company* or the whimsy of Steve Beresford.

The theoretical kernel of the book is part three, where Coudry takes on the classical composers. Wisely, he discusses those worth dealing with, Brian Ferneyhough and those Richard Toop called "the New Complexity", rather than wasting time blasting the New Spirituality (Pärt, Gorecki) or post-minimalist kitsch (Glass, Reich, Nyman). Though aware of the debates of the 60s, when classical theory "resembled an army in retreat", Coudry does not manage a materialist analysis. Music of all genres — jazz and pop as well as classical — reached a crisis in the 60s. Might this be because these were times of social and political possibility unseen since the 1920s? Instead of using politics to understand the situation in which art

finds itself, Coudry moralises about today's composers and their hierarchical, "managerial" mentality. Actually, the way New Complexity composers like Chris Dench and James Dillon strive to emulate high-tech control of micro-event gives their works an energy lacking in John Tavener or Michael Nyman, composers whose scores pander to traditional procedures.

Coudry's idea of free improvisation as a non-hierarchical model for musical production (like the political theory of André Gorz, whom he quotes) is preadhy and bloodless: it shuts out the social realities of jazz and rap and rock, the real-from-below practices of collective music making. Coudry wants to argue for free improvisation as a method to realise art music; he cannot see that it is precisely because it draws upon "non-art" processes (accident, personality, stand-up comedy timing, realtime poignancy) that it is so vital.

Coudry is right to be unhappy with Improv's pub-upstairs ghetto, but his inability to imagine a popular audience for the music (unlike, say, Rap, R&B, Punk, Pinks Zoo, Billy Jenkins, Ascension, Alan Wilkinson, Pat Thomas — none of whom get a mention) smacks of elitism. Conspiracy and Morphogenesis member Adam Bohman certainly makes some extraordinary noises, but for Coudry to posit him as the saviour widget for musical truth is rather far-fetched. If, instead of sitting at a desk piled with equipment, Bohman made his noises on a vulgar electric guitar (like, say, Caspar Brotzman), then Coudry's bureaucratic anachronism would probably be less entrenched.

Coudry's book was written in order to alert academics to the relevance of free improvisation. The partial nature of his argument in no way diminishes the urgency of its case. Cultural Studies and its media offshoots engage our attention with discussion of plurality and identity, resistance and the market, the cybernetic nature of commodified expression: free improvisation is an artform situated at the pivot of these ideological seesaws. As an attempt to point this out, Coudry's book is to be applauded (as long as applause doesn't reinforce HMT, that is).

REN WATSON

Available from Rubberneck, 21 Denham Drive, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG22 6LT, UK (overseas price: £4)

multi media

Mark Espiner hears radio on the Net and dub on CD-ROM

As the Web gets wider, the resource gets richer. Now, along with hypertext links, downloadable video clips, animations and soundtrack files, comes Real Audio. In the Web-world where 'real life' is sometimes referred to as 'RL,' and where virtual environments are de rigueur, Real Audio could mean many things. But in fact it is the Internet's reinvention of radio.

Considering that there have been attempts to transmit moving pictures, including a Rolling Stones live show, over the Web via the Multicast backbone (MBONE) system, and that with the right equipment and NetPhone you can make transatlantic telephone calls for free over the system, it is surprising that Real Audio has not happened sooner. The difference is that it is more widely available than NetTV or Netphones, not so demanding on hardware and deliverable on almost any machine. Real Audio allows extremely quick delivery of sound without having to download the data; the response is as quick as the

mouse click although the sound quality is quite poor. At the moment you can pick up extracts of interviews and snatches of music. Soon, software will be available which enables you to record your own material and deliver it over the Web in this way.

The Internet is not yet a live broadcast system. People click in and out of it, taking what information they want, when they want it. But there is a still a need for collective experience. Realtime audio may be heard as it happens but it is on demand. It is unlikely that you will hear what you choose to at the same time as someone else. Perhaps, before too long, there will be actual broadcasts — the advent of international radio — so you could listen to Sonic Youth or Remy Ongala on New York and Tanzanian radio respectively, and know that at the same time others were tuning in. This would widen the experience of the Web and certainly add to its dynamic. Real Audio takes it a step forward in this direction. ☐ Go to <http://www.realaudio.com/>



The Bush Telegraph — now brought online by Zion Train. This fanzine, once printed on hemp paper and full of marijuana facts, has been archived into soft copy and inserted into hypertext linked pages by the Zion Train collective along with many more themes including anarchy and agit prop, all of this links with the Web but also comes as part of *Homegrown Fantasy* — a brilliant, imaginative and expansive CD-ROM.

You enter the experience through the image of a cannabis leaf which dances on the screen, clicking on one of its five fingers takes you to different screens (a huge ear, a montage of musical instruments, a page of tune-like script) which offer musical, visual or text-based stimulation. Each one has a short narrative of its own: at last the musical and storytelling potential of this medium is explored in some kind of depth. Sometimes it is straightforward awareness arousal, through one of the tune-like characters you access a beautiful animation that takes you to a treehouse, on the wall of the house are photographs, the wall becomes interactive and clicking on the pictures expands them to show images of the M11 demonstrations, each one supported by text. The story is told simply but you have to interact to discover it.

Unlike most other music-based CD-ROMs, *Fantasy* isn't just a point and click environment. Stones are told, music (mostly dub) is played as soundtrack and you want to experiment with what is presented to you. The inevitable mixing desk makes an appearance, but in the

hands of Zion Train it's a new phenomenon: speakers are covered up and muffled, you uncover them to mix the sound. Mixing music interactively might still be a rather mundane exercise but the interface here offers a more imaginative experience than being presented with a basic four-track board as Bowie, Prince and Gabriel did. On the same screen, a click reveals the ingredients of the sound system from bass bins to amps — and details of how the group record their sound.

Analysis and history of the instruments they use (the trumpet used to be a wooden tube) are interspersed with arcane, pseudo-political facts ('Amsong Grace' was written by a slave trader turned minister).

The whole interactive experience is linked through the thread of Zion Train's music and their hippy-Utopian ideas about language, expression, politics, sound. A huge amount of information is managed and revealed with a compelling soundtrack. From a group whose new album, also called *Homegrown Fantasy*, has song titles such as 'Dance Of Life', 'Why Do We Have To Fight?' and 'One World One Heart', I feared the worst, but through their original and idiosyncratic approach in a new medium I have uncovered influences ranging from Van Morrison to King Tubby — with Tubby in evidence in the ROM soundtrack — and I have listened differently. Which is surely the whole point. ☐ *Homegrown Fantasy* is out now on Chino Records (through PolyGram). Mark Espiner can be e-mailed at mark@mmcorp.com



david toop

on fax wars, Ambient confusion, bald jazzers and Bo Diddley

I knew it meant trouble, the way steam rose off the brand new fax machine, paper rolling out like a blanket of grey clouds under a clear blue sky. The gist of the thing was a heartfelt complaint from Peter Kuhlmann, perhaps better known to you as Pete Namlook. Peter had taken one look at a *Morog* piece of mine, gobbled the headlines, developed a migraine over the visuals and taken aim at North London with his fax.

For the sake of good manners I won't regurgitate the piece except to outline the theme: to what, whether Ambient now that its allotted five minutes is supposedly used up? The visuals — dolphins — and headlines — "The A word. It seems nobody wants to be Ambient anymore it's become a dirty word" — is this the end for the sound of the chill out? — were way outside my jurisdiction. As is often the case, however, these are the elements of a magazine feature that cause maximum offence to readers. Their purpose, after all, is to grab the restless, unimpaired eye with something inflammatory, a famous name, a clear argument (preferably the wrong one), a mention of oral sex in Hollywood or, in the case of writers who specialise in philosophical quicksand, to lure readers onto a tiny patch of terra firma before the ground goes liquid.

Subsequent Letters Page (and other postal) disputes can spit and maul themselves through attention into absurdity, but the fax machine is designed for. Some conflicts. Just boom! Clash. Fresh. Peter's objections to the headlines were unfair on me, though eminently reasonable. I paraphrase Ambient may not be a perfect word but it has opened the field for a mixed bag of otherwise marginalised musics. I quote "The range of music in the field called AMBIENT goes now from classical, jazz, psychedelic-rock, space-funk-rock, folk, ethnic, industrial, electro, environmental, concrete and experimental MUSIC." He could have

added improvisation and Easy Listening, dub and Jungle, TripHop and Fourth World, avant blues (Reiner and Ry Cooder) and avant country (BJ Cole), but he's lost made the point.

As for the dolphins, he thought they were a cliché. Well, they weren't my fault either, although I notice that some kind of revisionist thing is going on with dolphins at the moment. Current TV zoology suggests that the dolphin can be a nasty brute, spiteful and aggressive, which flies a New Age cliché into some kind of isolationist undercurrent. But undercurrent or underpants, who cares? I boomed off my return fire to Frankfurt, a six page lesson in the pragmatics of journalism which pointed out that beneath the headlines, we were both sharing the same view so gimme a break.

Back came the reply, a gracious apology and some lines of amazement regarding the fact that writers can lose control of their work in degrees that range from mildly imitating to apologetically shaming. Most of these spots arise out of frustration. The crux of the matter is terminology. How to name the unnameable? Why name it? How to sell it without a name? What kind of psychiatric counselling to use once you've been fixed in a category where you don't want to be? After all these years strangers ask me what kind of music I make and I'm tempted still to erret depressingly over-familiar impressions of a lost bee in search of its hive. By now even I'm dissatisfied with the "mmmmmm" evocations so I come right out with it. I do Ambient.

Imperfect, I agree. Hopeless, even. I don't mind. What am I going to say at a pleasant summer party attended by normal humans (ie not music fanatics)? That I'm a postmodern electroacoustic composer-improvisor? Or be cute about 'breaking down boundaries'? I don't share their respective visions, particularly, but Elvis Costello's *Meltdown* season at the South Bank or Towa Tei's brand of

Techno-tropicalista-bachelor-pad-bossa-nova-Ambient-psychedelia featured on his new *Future Listening* album raise the same issue. Music is moving out of the niche market trap into a many-headed beast/multi-mansions-in-my-father's-house type incarnation.

About time too, there being only a few years left before the future arrives. But away from pure theory, the contradictions are as fascinating as ever. Six months ago, MLO and Lo Recordings supreme Jon Tye was drinking with me in one of my local pubs, and when we had drunk enough he probed me for my ultimate dream of a collaborative duo. I shut down momentarily but on recovery blurted Bo Diddley's name. I could have said anybody from Dillinja to Ella Fitzgerald. Why Bo Diddley should want to work with me, be sampled and warped and what on earth would happen afterwards I don't know but there it was, on the table with the coasters and crisps.

The feeling that anything is possible in the contemporary electronic environment is intoxicating. After a stream of beers and Joris's departure I went downstairs to the basement, just catching the final number of a set by Gile Blanchflower's house band — double bass, drums, piano — with visiting guest spot filled by the bald soprano Lol Coxhill. Not feeling on top form, I was spellbound nonetheless by the quarter's rendition of a jazz standard. Elastic, emotionally direct yet harmonically and rhythmically obtuse, relaxed yet walking on a thin wire of tension, this prehistoric set-up revived my interest in jazz, which I have been coming to despise, and live music, of which I had heard little of real discovery and unfoldment since Budu Malik and the Misa brothers at last summer's Indian music Prom. Just when you think the unnameable future has arrived, the past can clout you around the head with a lesson, out of nowhere, or even five minutes walk from your own doorstep. □



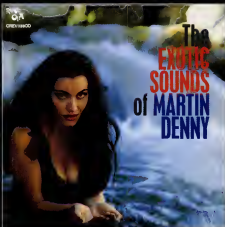
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